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A

# TALE OF SIN.

BY

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

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PHILADELPHIA:

L. R. HAMERSLY & CO.

1871.



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# A TALE OF SIN.

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MARY LAYNE.

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A

TALE OF SIN.

BY  
JOHNNY LUDLOW.

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and be reconciled, and Lady Chavasse refused to receive her. Mrs. Cust had to go back again as she came. I should not like to see my wife treat her mother so.

*May 30.*—The child is to be named Geoffrey Arthur. Sir Peter had a dislike to his own name, and had said he hoped never to call a boy of his by the same. Lady Chavasse, mindful of his every wish, has fixed on the other two. I asked her if they were the names of relatives; she laughed and said no; she fixed on them because she thought them both nice-sounding and noble names.

The above is all that need be copied from Mr. Layne; one has to be chary of space.

Little Sir Geoffrey grew and thrived; and it was a pleasure, people say, to see how happy his mother and he were, and how she devoted herself to him. He had come to her in the midst of her desolation, when she had nothing else to care for in life. It was already seen that he would be much like his father, who had been a good-looking man in his day. Little Geoffrey had Sir Peter's fair complexion and his dark-blue eyes. He was a sweet, tractable child; and Lady Chavasse thought him just an angel come out of heaven.

Time went on. When Geoffrey was about seven years old—and a very pretty boy with fair curls—he went out surreptitiously on a fishing expedition, fell into the pond, and was nearly drowned. It left a severe cold upon him, which his nurse, Wilkins, said served him right. However, from that time he seemed to be less strong; and at length Lady Chavasse took him to London to show him to the doctors. The doctors told her he ought to be for a time in a warmer climate, and she went with him into Devonshire. But he still kept delicate; and the upshot was

that Lady Chavasse let the Grange for a term to the Goldingham family, and went away.

And so, many years passed. The Goldinghams lived on at the Grange, and Lady Chavasse nearly slipped out of remembrance. Mr. Layne grew into ill health as he got older, and advertised for a partner. It was Duffham who answered it (a youngish man then), and they went into arrangements.

It is necessary to say something of Mr. Layne's children. There were four of them, girls. The eldest, Susan, married a Lieutenant Layne (some distant relative, who came from the West Indies), and went with him to India, where his regiment was serving, taking also her next sister, Eleanor. The third, Elizabeth, was at home; the young one, Mary, was in a school, as governess-pupil, or under-teacher. It is not often that village practitioners can save money, let alone make a fortune.

The next thing was, that Mr. Layne died. His death made all the difference to his family. Mr. Duffham succeeded to the practice; by arrangement he was to pay something yearly for five years to Mrs. Layne; and she had a small income of her own. She would not quit the house; it was her's now her husband was gone. Mr. Duffham took one opposite—a tall house with a bow-window to the parlor; before that he had been in apartments. Mary Layne came home about this time, and stayed there for some weeks. She had been a great deal over-worked in the school, and Mrs. Layne thought she required rest. She was a pleasing girl, with soft brown eyes, very good and gentle; thinking always of others, never of self. Old Duffham may choose to deny it now he's got old; but he thought her superior then to the whole world.

Matters were in this state when news spread that the Goldinghams had got notice to quit the Grange: Sir Geoffry, who would be of age the following year, was coming to it with his mother. Accordingly, the Goldinghams departed; and the place was re-embellished and put in order for the rightful owner. He arrived in April with Lady Chavasse: and I'll copy for you what Duffham says about it. Old Layne had been dead two years then.

*From Mr. Duffham's Diary.*

*April 29.*—The new people, or I suppose I ought to say the old people—reached the Grange yesterday, and I was called in to-day to the lady's maid—Wilkins. My lady I don't like; Sir Geoffry I do. He's a good-looking, slight young man of middle height, with a fair, refined face, and honest eyes, blue as they tell me Sir Peter's used to be. An honorable, well-intentioned young fellow I am sure; affable and considerate as his mother is haughty. Poor Layne used to cry her up; he thought great things of her. I don't. It may be that power has made her selfish, and foreign travel imperious; but she's both now. She's nice-looking still; and though she wants but a year of forty, and her son is only one-and-twenty, they are more like brother and sister. Or would be, but for Sir Geoffry's exceeding consideration for his mother; his love and deference for her are a pattern to the young men of the present day. She has trained him to be obedient, that's certain, and to love her, too; and so I suppose she has done her duty by him well. He came down the broad walk with me from the hall door, talking of his mother: I had happened to say that the place must seem quite strange to Lady Chavasse. "Yes it must," he answered. "She has exiled

herself from it for my sake. Mr. Duffham," he continued warmly, "you cannot imagine what an amiable mother mine has been! She resigned ease, rest, society, to devote herself to me. She gave me a home-tutor, that she might herself watch over and train me; she went to and fro between England and foreign places with me perpetually; even when I was at Oxford, she took a house a mile or two out that we might not be quite separated. I pray Heaven constantly that I may never cross her in thought, word or deed: but live only to repay her love." Rather Utopian this: but I honor the young fellow for it. I've only seen him for an hour at most, and am already wishing there were more like him in the world. If his mother has faults, he does not see them; he will never honor any other woman as he honors her. A contrast, this, to the contempt, ingratitude, and disrespect that some sons think it manly to show their best and truest earthly parent.

My lady is vexed, I can see, at this inopportune illness of her maid's; for the Grange is all agog with the preparations for the grand fête to be held on the 20th of next month, when Sir Geoffry will come of age. Wilkins has been in the family for many years: she was originally the boy's nurse: and is quite the right hand of Lady Chavasse, so far as household management goes. Her illness just now is inopportune.

*End, for the present, of Mr. Duffham's Diary.*

Nothing was talked of, in the village or out of it, but the grand doings that were to usher in the majority of Sir Geoffry. As to Lady Chavasse, few people had seen her. Her maid's illness, as was supposed, kept her in-doors; and some of the guests were already arriving at the Grange.

One morning, when it wanted about a week to the 20th, Mrs. Layne, making a pillow-case at her parlor window, in her widow's cap and spectacles, with the venetian blind open to get all the light, was startled by seeing Lady Chavasse's barouche drawn up to her door, and Lady Chavasse within it preparing to get out. Mrs. Layne instinctively rose, as to a superior, and tore her glasses off; it has been said she was of an humble turn: and upon Lady Chavasse fixing her eyes upon her in what seemed some surprise, dropped a curtsy, and thought to herself how fortunate it was she happened to have put a clean new cap on. With that Lady Chavasse said something to the footman, who banged the carriage-door to, and ordered the coachman across the road. Mrs. Layne understood it at once: she had come to the house in mistake for Duffham's. Of course, with that grand carriage to look at opposite, and the gorgeous servants, and my lady, in a violet velvet mantle trimmed with ermine, alighting and stepping in to Duffham's, Mrs. Layne let fall her pillow-case, and did no more of it. But she was not prepared, when Lady Chavasse came out again with Mr. Duffham, to see him escort her over the road. Mrs. Layne had just time to open her parlor door, and say to the servant, "In the other room; show her ladyship into the other room," before she went off into complete bewilderment, and ran away with the pillow-case.

The other room was the best room. Mary Layne sat there at the old piano, practicing. She had seen and heard nothing of all this: and rose up in astonishment when the invasion took place. A beautiful lady, whom Mary did not know or recognize, was holding out a delicately-gloved hand to her, and saying that she esembled her father. It was Mary

Layne's first meeting with Lady Chavasse: she had just come home again from some heavy place of teaching, finding her strength unequal to it.

"I should have known you, I think, for a daughter of Mr. Layne's had I met you in the street," said Lady Chavasse, graciously.

Mary was blushing like anything. Lady Chavasse thought her an elegant girl, in spite of the shabby black silk she was dressed in: very pretty, too. At least, it was a nice countenance; and my lady quite took to it. Mrs. Layne, having collected her wits, and taken off her apron, came in then: and Mary, who was humble-minded also, though not exactly as her mother was, modestly retired.

My lady was all graciousness: just as much so that morning as she used to be. Perhaps the sight of Mrs. Layne put her in mind of the old days when she was herself suffering trouble, and not knowing how matters would turn out for her, or how they would not. She told Mrs. Layne that she had, unthinkingly, bid her servants that morning drive to *Mr. Layne's*: and it was only when she saw Mrs. Layne at the window in her widow's cap, that she remembered the mistake. She talked of her son Geoffry, praising his worth and his goodness; she bade Mrs. Layne to the fête on the 20th, saying she must come and bring her two daughters, and she would take no denial. And Mrs. Layne, curtseying five hundred times—which did not become her, for she was very stout—opened the front door to her ladyship with her own hands, and stood there curtseying until the carriage had dashed away.

"We'll go on the 20th," she said to her daughters. "I didn't like to say nay to her Ladyship; and I'd be glad to see what the young heir's like. He was as pretty a baby as you'd wish to see. There'll be

some folks there of our own condition, no doubt, that we can mix with: it'll be in the open air: so we shan't feel strange."

But when the day arrived, and they had reached the Grange, it seemed that they felt very strange. Whether amidst the crowds they did not find any of their "own condition," or that none were there, Mrs. Layne did not know. Once, they caught sight of Lady Chavasse. Lady Chavasse, surrounded by a bevy of people that Mrs. Layne took to be lords and ladies—and perhaps she was right—bowed distantly, and waved her hand, as much as to say, "Make yourselves at home, but don't trouble me:" and Mrs. Layne curtsied herself to a respectful distance. It was a fine bright day, very warm; and she sat on a bench in the park with her daughters, listening to the band, looking at the company, and wondering which was the heir. Some hours seemed to pass in this way, and gradually the grounds grew deserted. People were eating and drinking in a distant tent—the lords and ladies Mrs. Layne supposed, and she did not presume to venture among them. Presently a young man approached, who had observed from a distance the solitary group. A fat old lady in widows' mourning; and the younger ones in pretty white bonnets and black silks.

"Will you allow me to take you where you will get some refreshment," he said, raising his hat, and addressing Mrs. Layne.

She paused before answering, taken aback by his looks, as she described it afterward, for he put her in mind of Sir Peter. It was as nice a face as Sir Peter's used to be, clean-shaved, except for the light whiskers: and if those were not Sir Peter's kindly blue eyes, why her memory failed her. But the dress puzzled Mrs. Layne: he wore a dark-blue frock coat

and gray trowsers, a white waistcoat with a thin gold chain passed across it and dropping seal: all very nice and gentlemanly certainly, but quite plain. What she had expected to see the heir attired in, Mrs. Layne never afterward settled with herself: perhaps purple and miniver.

"I beg your pardon, sir," she said, speaking at length, "but I think you must be Sir Geoffry?"

"Yes, I am Sir Geoffry."

"Lord bless me!" cried Mrs. Layne.

She told him curtsying, who she was, adding, as an apology for being found there, that her ladyship had invited her and her girls, and wouldn't take a denial. Geoffry held out his arm to take her to the tent, and glanced behind at the girls, remembering what his mother had said to him of one of them: "a sweet-looking young woman, Geoffry, poor Layne's daughter, quite elegant." Yes, she was sweet-looking, Geoffry decided. The elder one was like her mother, short, stout—and Geoffry could not help seeing it—common. He told Mrs. Layne that he could remember her husband still: he spoke of a ride the doctor had taken him, seated before him on his horse; and altogether in that short minute or two won, by his true affability, the heart of the doctor's widow.

The tent was crowded to confusion. Waiters were running about, and there was much clatter of knives and forks. Sir Geoffry could find but two places anyway; at which he seated Mrs. Layne and her daughter Elizabeth, according to precedence.

"I will find you a place in the other tent, if you will come with me," he said to Mary.

She wished to refuse. She had a suspicion that the other tent was the one for the "lords and ladies," people who were

altogether above her. But Sir Geoffry was holding up the canvas for her to pass out, and she was too timid to disobey. He walked by her side nearly in silence, speaking a courteous word or two only, to put her at her ease. The band was playing, "The Roast Beef of Old England."

But the other tent seemed in worse confusion as far as crowding went. Some one turned on her seat to accost Sir Geoffry: a slight, upright girl, with finely-carved features of that creamy white rarely seen, and a haughty expression in her very light eyes.

"You are being waited for, Geoffry. Don't you preside?"

"No: nonsense," he answered. "There's to be nothing of that kind, Rachel; no presiding. I am going to walk about and look about for stray people. Some of the strangers will get nothing, if they are not seen after, could you make room for one by you?"

"Who is it?" she asked.

Sir Geoffry said a word in her ear, and she moved a few inches higher up. He stepped back to Mary Layne. She had been looking at the young lady, who was so richly dressed—in some thin material of shining blue and lace—and who was so entirely at her ease as to be sitting without her bonnet, which she had put at her feet.

"We have made a place for you," said Sir Geoffry. "I fear you will be a little crowded. Miss Layne, Rachel."

Mary waited to thank him before taking it. Her cheeks were full of blushes, her soft dark eyes went out to his. She felt ashamed that he should take so much trouble for her, and strove to say it. Sir Geoffry held her hand while he answered, his own eyes looking back again.

But Mary sat for some minutes before any one came to wait on her. The young

lady whom Sir Geoffry had called Rachel was busy with her own plate, and did not observe. Presently, she looked round.

"Dear me! what are they about? Field?" she imperatively called out to the butler, who was passing. He turned at once.

"My lady?"

"Have the goodness to attend here," said Lady Rachel, indicating the vacant space before Miss Layne. "This lady has had nothing."

"So I am amidst the lords and ladies," thought Mary, as the butler presented her with a card of the dishes, made out in French, and inquired what she would be pleased to take. She was inexperienced and shy; and did not know where to look or what to say. Lady Rachel spoke to her once or twice, and was civilly distant: and so the half-hour was got over. When Sir Geoffry's health was proposed by Lord L. the young baronet suddenly appeared in his rightful place at the table's head. He thanked them all very heartily in a few words; and said he hoped he *should* live long, as they had all just been wishing him, live that he might repay his dear mother one tithe of the sacrifices she had made, and the love she had lavished on him.

The cheers broke forth as he finished, his eyes wet with the sincerity of his feeling, the music burst out with a crash, "See the conquering hero comes," and Mary Layne felt every nerve thrill within her; as if she would faint with the excess of the unwonted emotion.

#### *Mr. Duffham's Diary.*

June 2.—The rejoicings are well over, and Sir Geoffry Chavasse is his own master. In law, at any rate; but it strikes me he will never know any will but his

mother's. It's not that he possesses none of his own—rather the contrary I fancy; but in his filial love and reverence he merges it in hers. It is, on the one hand, good to see: on the other, one can but fancy his ideal of the fifth commandment is somewhat exaggerated. Lady Chavasse on her part seems bound up in him. To him there is no sign of imperiousness, no assertion of self-will: and, so far as can be seen, she does not *exact* deference. "Geoffry, would you wish this?" she says. "Geoffry, would you like the other? My darling Geoffry, don't you think it might be well to do so-and-so?" No. It is a case of true genuine filial respect and love; and one can but honor Lady Chavasse for having gained it.

My lady has condescended to be almost confidential with me. The illness of her maid has been a long and serious one, and I have had to be a good deal at the Grange. "Sir Geoffry is engaged to be married, Mr. Duffham," he said to me yesterday, when our conversation had turned—as it often does—on Sir Geoffry. I could not help showing some surprise: and, one word leading to another, I soon grasped the whole case. Not so much by what she directly said, as by the habit I have of putting two-and-two together.

Conspicuous amidst the guests at the fête on the 20th of May, was Lady Rachel Derretson: a cold, self-possessed girl, with strictly classical features, and the palest blue eyes I ever saw. It would be a very handsome face—and indeed *is*—but for the cold proud expression; she is the daughter of one of Lady Chavasse's sisters, who married the Earl of Derretson, and is now a very slender-portioned widow with some expensive daughters. It is to this Lady Rachel that Sir Geoffry is engaged. The engagement is not of his own seeking, or of hers; the two mothers

settled it between them when the children were young, and they have been brought up to look on each other as future husband and wife; and have done so as a matter-of course. Neither of them, by what I can gather, has the slightest intention or wish to turn aside from fulfilling the contract: they will ratify it in just the same business manner, and with the same calm feelings that they would take the lease of a house. It is not their fault: they should not have been led into it. Human nature is cross and contrary as a sour crab. Had the two young people been thrown together now for the first time, and been warned *not* to fall in love with each other, the chances are they'd have tumbled headlong into it before the week is out. As it is, they like each other as cousins, or brother and sister, but they will never get beyond that. *I* can see. The two sisters have a private understanding with each other—and my young Lady Rachel dutifully falls in with it—that after the marriage Lady Chavasse shall still live and rule at the Grange. Indeed she implied it when she let fall the words, perhaps unthinkingly, "Geoffry would never marry to put me out of my home here, Mr. Duffham." I am sure that he never would.

Lady Rachel is here still. I often see her and Sir Geoffry together, in-doors or out; but I have never yet seen a symptom of courtship on either side. They call each other "Geoffry" and "Rachel;" and are as indifferently familiar as brother and sister. That they will be sufficiently happy with a quiet, moonlight kind of happiness is nearly sure. I find that I am not at liberty to mention this engagement abroad; and that's why I say my lady has grown confidential with me.

June 29.—Wilkins continues very ill, and it puts my lady about amazingly. The



maid who has been taking Wilkins' duties, Hester Picker, is a raw country girl of the locality, Goody Picker's daughter; her services being as different from those of the easy, experienced Wilkins, as dark is from light. "She manages my hair atrociously," cried my lady to me one day in her vexation; "she attempted to write a note for me in answer to inquiries for the character of my late page, and the spelling was so bad it could not be sent."

Lady Rachel has left. Sir Geoffry escorted her to her home, near Bath, stayed two days there, and came back again; and glad to be back, evidently; he does not care to be long separated from his mother. The more I see of this young fellow, the more I like him. He has no bad habits; does not smoke or swear; reads, rides, drives, loves flowers, and is ever ready to do a good turn for rich or poor.

"You appear to have grown up quite strong, Sir Geoffry," I said to him to-day when we were in the greenhouse, and he leaped on a ledge to do something or other to the broken cord of the window.

"Oh, quite," he answered. "I think I am stronger and heartier than most men; and I owe the thanks for it to my mother. It was not only my health of body she cared for and watched over, but of mind. She taught me to love rational pursuits, in contradistinction to those irrational; she showed me how to choose the good and reject the evil; it is she alone who has made me what I am."

*July 5.*—Mary Layne is going to the Grange as companion to Lady Chavasse. "Humble companion," as my lady takes care to put it. It has been brought about in this way. Wilkins is slightly improving, but it will be months before she can resume her duties about Lady Chavasse; and my lady has at length got this opinion out of me.

"Five or six months!" she exclaimed in dismay. "But it is only what I have lately suspected. Mr. Duffham, I have been thinking that I must take a companion; and now this has confirmed it. An humble companion, who will not object to do my hair on state occasions, and superintend Picker's trimming of my dresses, especially the lace; and who will write notes for me when I desire it, and read to me when Sir Geoffry's not here; and sit with me if I wish it. She'd not dine with us, of course; but I must sometimes let her sit down to luncheon. In short, what I want is a well-educated, lady-like young woman, who will make herself useful. Do you happen to know of one?"

I mentioned Mary Layne. She has been wishing not to return to the heavy work and confinement of a school, where she had to sit up late, night after night, correcting exercises, and touching up drawings by gas-light. My lady caught at it at once.

"Mary Layne! the very thing. I like the look of the girl much, Mr. Duffham; and of course she'll not be above doing anything required of her; Layne, the apothecary's daughter, can't be called a gentlewoman in position, you know."

She forgot I was an apothecary also; I'll give her that credit. But this is a specimen of the way my lady's exclusive spirit peeps out.

And so it's settled. And if Miss Mary had been suddenly offered a position in the royal household, she could not have thought more of it. "Mr. Duffham, I will try my very best to satisfy Lady Chavasse," says she to me in an ecstasy. "I'll do anything and everything required of me; who am I that I should be above it?" And by the glistening of her soft brown eyes, and the rose-bloom on her cheeks, it

would seem that she expects she's going into fairy-land. Well, the Grange is a nice place; and she is to have thirty guineas a year. At the last school she had twenty pounds; at the first, ten.

*End of the Diary for the present.*

## CHAPTER II.

MISS LAYNE entered the Grange with trepidation. She had never been inside the house, and at first she thought it was fairy-land realized, and that she was out of place in it. A broad flight of three or four steps led up to the wide entrance door; the beauteous colors from the painted windows shone on the mosaic-flagged hall. On the right were the grand drawing-rooms; on the left the dining-room and Sir Geoffry's library. Behind, going down a step or two, was a low, shady apartment, its glass doors opening on a small grass-plat, round which flowers were placed, and beyond it was a fragrant herbary. It was called the garden-room; and on the morning of Miss Layne's arrival, after she had taken off her things, Hester Picker (who thought as much nearly of the old surgeon's daughter as she did of my lady) curtsyed her into it, and said it was to be Miss Layne's sitting-room, when not with my lady.

Mary Layne looked around. She thought it charming. It had an old Turkey carpet, and faded red chairs, and a shabby checked cloth on the table, with other ancient furniture; but the subdued light was grateful after the garish July sun, and the sweetness came in from the herbs and flowers. Mary stood, wondering what she had to do first, and not quite daring to sit down even on one of the old red chairs. The Grange was the Grange, and my lady was my lady; and they were al-

together above the sphere in which they had been brought up. She had a new lilac muslin dress on, fresh and simple, her smooth brown hair had a bit of lilac ribbon in it; and she looked as pretty and lady-like as a girl can look. Standing at the back there beyond the table, was she, when Sir Geoffry walked in at the glass door, his light summer coat thrown back, and a heap of small paper packets in his hands, containing seeds. At first he looked astonished, not remembering her.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," he exclaimed, his face lighting up, as he took off his straw hat. "Miss Layne, I think. I did not know you at the minute. My mother said she expected you to-day." He came round to her with outstretched hand, and then put a chair for her, just as though she had been a duchess—or Lady Rachel Derretson. Mary did not take the chair; she felt strange in her new home, and as yet very timid.

"I am not sure what Lady Chavasse would wish me to do," she ventured to say, believing it might be looked upon as next door to a crime to be seen idle, in a place where she was to receive thirty guineas a year. "There appears to be no work here."

"Get a book and read," cried Sir Geoffry. "I'll find you one as soon as I have put up these seeds. There's a box of new novels just come from town. Miss Layne, I hope you will make yourself at home

with us, and be happy," he added in his kindness.

"Thank you, sir; I am sure I shall."

He was putting up the seeds, when Lady Chavasse entered. She had a way of taking likes and dislikes; and she never scrupled to show either. On the first day, it seemed that she did not know how to make enough of Mary. She chose to forget that she was only to be the humble companion, and treated her as a guest. She carried her in to take luncheon with herself and Sir Geoffry; she made her play and sing; she showed her the drawing-rooms and the flower gardens, and finally took her out in the barouche. She certainly did not ask her into dinner, but said she should expect her to come to the drawing-room afterward, and spend the evening. And Miss Layne, not ignorant of the customs obtaining in great houses, dressed herself for it in her one evening dress of white-spotted muslin, and changed the lilac ribbon in her hair for blue.

So that, you perceive, the girl was inaugurated at the Grange as a young lady, almost as an equal, and not as a servant—as Lady Chavasse's true opinion would have classed her. That was mistake the first. For it led Sir Geoffry to make a companion of Miss Layne; that is, to treat her as though she belonged to them; which otherwise he certainly would not have done. Had Miss Layne been assigned her true place at first—the place that Lady Chavasse meant her to fill, that of an inferior and humble dependent—Sir Geoffry, out of simple respect to the girl and to his mother, would have kept his distance.

As the time passed on they grew great friends. Lady Chavasse retained her liking for Mary, and saw no harm in the growing intimacy with Sir Geoffry. That was mistake the second. Both of them were

drifting into love; but Lady Chavasse dreamt it not. The social gulf that spread itself between Sir Geoffry Chavasse, Baronet, and Mary Layne, daughter of the late hard-worked apothecary, was one that Lady Chavasse would have said (had she been asked to think about it) could never be bridged over; and for this very reason she saw no danger in the intercourse. She regarded Miss Layne as of a totally different order from themselves, and never supposed but Sir Geoffry did, too.

And so time went on, on the wings of love. There were garden walks together and moonlight saunterings; meetings in my lady's presence, meetings without it. Sir Geoffry, going in and out of the garden parlor at will, as he had been accustomed to do—for it was where all kind of things belonging to him were kept; choice seeds, his fishing-rods, his collection of butterflies—would linger there by the hour together, talking to Miss Layne at her work. And, before either of them was conscious of the danger, they had each passed into a dream, that changed everything about them to Paradise.

Of course Sir Geoffry, when he awoke to the truth—that it was love—ought to have gone away. Or have contrived to get his mother to dismiss Miss Layne. He did nothing of the sort. And, for this, some people—Duffham for one—held him even more to blame than for anything afterward. But how could he voluntarily blight his new happiness, and hers? It was so intense as to absorb every other feeling; it took his common sense away from him. And thus they went dreaming on together in that one sweet spring-time (of the heart, not of the weather), and never thought about sliding into shoals and pitfalls.

In the autumn my lady went to the seaside in Cornwall, taking Mary as her

*maid*, and escorted by her son. "Will you do for me what I want while I am away? I do not care to be troubled with Picker," she had said; and Mary replied, as in duty bound, that she would. It is inconvenient to treat a maid as a lady; and Mary found that during this sojourn Lady Chavasse did not attempt it. To all intents and purposes Mary was the maid now; she did not sit with her lady, she had her meals apart; she was, in fact, regarded as the lady's maid by all, and nothing else. Lady Chavasse even called her "Layne." This, the sudden dethroning her of her social status, was the third mistake; and this one, as the first, was my lady's. Sir Geoffry had been led to regard her as a companion; now he saw her but as a servant. But, servant or no servant, you cannot put love out of the heart, once it has got possession of it.

At the month's end they returned home: and there Mary found that she was to retain this low station: never again would she be exalted as she had been. Lady Chavasse had tired of the new toy, and just carelessly allowed her to find her own level. Except that Miss Layne sat in the garden parlor and her meals were served there, she was not much distinguished from Hester Picker and the other servants; indeed, Picker often came to sit in the parlor, too, when they had lace, or what else, to mend for my lady. Geoffry in his heart was grieved at the changed treatment of Miss Layne; and, to make up for it, was with her a great deal himself.

And so the winter wore on. In January Lady Chavasse and her son went to stay with Lady Derreston at Bath. Picker was taken, not Miss Layne. In the Countess' small household, Mary, in her anomalous position—for she could not be altogether put with the servants—would

have been an inconvenience: and my lady bade her make herself happy at the Grange, and left her a lot of fine needle-work to get through.

And now all that has to be told to the paper's end is taken from diaries, Duffham's and others. But for convenience sake, I put it as though the words were my own, instead of copying literally.

Spring came in early. February was not quite at an end, and the trees were now beginning to show their green. All the month it had been warm weather; but people said it was too relaxing for the season, and they and the trees should suffer for it later. A good bit of sickness was going about, and amidst others who had to give in for a time, was Duffham himself. He got inflammation of the lungs. His brother Luke, who was partner in a medical firm elsewhere, came to Church Dykely for a week or two, to take the patients. He was a plain-speaking man of forty, with rough hair, and a good heart.

The afternoon after he arrived, a respectable woman came into the surgery with her daughter. It was Mrs. Layne, but the temporary doctor did not know her. Mrs. Layne never did look like a lady, and she had flung a very ancient cloak over her worn morning gown. She expressed herself disappointed at not seeing Mr. Duffman, but opened the consultation with the brother instead. Mrs. Layne took it for granted she was known, and talked accordingly.

Her daughter, whom she kept calling Mary, and nothing else, had been ailing lately; she, Mrs. Layne, couldn't think what was the matter with her, unless it was the warm spring. She got thinner and weaker daily; her cheeks were white, her eyes seemed to have no life in them;

she was very low in spirits. In spite of all this Mary had kept on saying it was "nothing." My Lady Chavasse—returning home from Bath a day or two ago, her son having gone on to London—was so struck with the change she saw in Mary, who lived with her as humble companion, Mrs. Layne added, in a parenthesis, that she insisted on her going to Mr. Duffham, that he might prescribe some tonics. And accordingly Mary had walked to her mother's this afternoon.

Mr. Luke Duffham listened to all this with one ear, as it were. He supposed it might be the warm spring, as suggested. However, he took Mary into the patient's room, and examined her: felt her pulse, looked at her tongue, sounded her chest, with all the rest of it that doctors treat their clients to and asked her this, that, and the other—about five-and-twenty questions, when perhaps five might have done. The upshot of it all was, that Mary Layne went off in a dead faint.

"What on earth can be the matter with her?" cried the alarmed mother, when they had brought her round.

Mr. Luke Duffham, going back to the surgery with Mrs. Layne, shut the doors, and told her what he thought it was. It so startled the old lady that she backed against the counter and upset the scales.

"How dare you say so, sir?"

"But I am sure of it," returned Mr. Luke.

"Lord be good to me!" gasped Mrs. Layne, looking like one terrified out of her seven senses. "The worst I feared was that it might be consumption. A sister of mine died in it."

"Where shall I send the medicine to?" inquired the doctor.

"Anywhere. Over the way, if you like," continued Mrs. Layne, in her perturbation.

"Certainly. Where to, over the way?"

"To my house. Don't you know me? I am the widow of your brother's late partner. This unhappy child is the one he was fondest of; she is much younger than the rest."

"Mrs. Layne," thought Luke Duffham in surprise, "I wish I had known; I might have hesitated before speaking plainly. But where would have been the good?"

The first thing Mrs. Layne did, was to shut her own door against Mary, and send her back to the Grange in a shower of anger. She was an honest old lady; of most irreproachable character; never needing, as she phrased it, to have had a blush on her cheek, for herself or anybody belonging to her. In her indignation, she could have crushed Mary to the earth. Whatever it might be that the poor girl had done, robbed a church, or shot its parson, her mother deemed that she deserved hanging.

Mary Layne walked back to the Grange: where else had she to go? Broken-hearted, humiliated, weak almost unto death, she was like a reed in her mother's hands, yielding herself to any command given; and only wishing she might die. Lady Chavasse, compassionating her evident suffering, brought her a glass of wine with her own hand, and inquired what Mr. Duffham said, and whether he was going to give her tonics. Instead of answering, Mary went into another faint: and my lady thought she had over-walked herself. "I wish I had sent her in the carriage," said she, kindly. And while the wish was yet upon her lips, Mrs. Layne arrived at the Grange, to request an audience of my lady.

Then was commotion. My lady talked and stormed. Mrs. Layne talked and cried. Both were united in one thing—

the heaping of reproaches on Mary. They were in the grand drawing-room—where my lady had been sitting when Mrs. Layne was shown in. Lady Chavasse sat back, furious and scornful, in her pink velvet chair; Mrs. Layne stood; Mary had sunk on the carpet kneeling, her face bent, her clasped hands raised as if imploring mercy. This group was suddenly broken in upon by Sir Geoffry—who had but then reached the Grange from town. They were too noisy to notice him. Halting in dismay, he had the pleasure of catching a sentence or two of the conversation.

"The best thing you can do is to find refuge in the workhouse," stormed Lady Chavasse. "Out of my house you turn this hour."

"The best thing you can do is to go on the tramp, where you won't be known," amended Mrs. Layne, who was nearly beside herself with conflicting emotions. "Never again shall you enter the home that was your poor dead father's. You wicked girl!—and you only twenty years old yet! But, my lady, I can but think—though I know we are humble people, as compared, and perhaps I've no right to say it—that Sir Geoffry has not behaved like a gentleman."

"Hold your tongue, woman," said her Ladyship. "Sir Geoffry——"

"Sir Geoffry is at least enough of a gentleman to take his evil deeds on himself, and not shift them on others," spoke the baronet, stepping forward—and the unexpected interruption was startling to them all. My lady pointed imperatively to the door, but he stood his ground.

It was no doubt a bitter moment for him; bringing home to him an awful amount of self-humiliation: for throughout his life he had striven to do right instead of wrong. And when these better

men yield to temptation instead of fleeing from it, the reacting sting is of the sharpest. The very strongest sometimes fall; and find too late that though the fall was so easy, the picking-up is of all things most difficult. Sir Geoffry's face was white as death.

"Get up, Mary," he said, taking her hand to help her in all respect. "Mrs. Layne," he added, turning to face the others, "my dear mother—if I may dare still to call you so—suffer me to say a word. For all that has taken place, I am alone to blame; on me only must it rest. The fault——"

"Sin, sir," interrupted Mrs. Layne.

"Yes. Thank you. Sin. The sin lies with me, not with Mary. In my presence reproach shall not be visited on her. She has enough trouble to bear without that. I wish to heaven that I had never—Mrs. Layne, believe me," he resumed, after the breaking pause, "no one can feel this more keenly than I. And, if circumstances permit me to make reparation, I will."

Sir Geoffry wanted (circumstances permitting, as he shortly put it) to marry Mary Layne; he *wished* to do it. Taking his mother into another room, he told her this. Lady Chavasse simply thought him mad. She grew a little afraid of him: lest he should set her and all high rules of propriety at naught, and do it.

But trouble like this cannot be settled in an hour. Lady Chavasse, in her great fear, conciliated just a little: she did not turn Miss Layne out at once, as threatened, but suffered her to remain at the Grange for the night.

"In any case, whatever may be the ending of this, it is not from my family that this risk of exposure must come," spoke Sir Geoffry. "It might leave me no alternative."

"No alternative?" repeated Lady Chavasse. "How?"

"Between my duty to you, and my

duty to her," said Sir Geoffry. And my lady's heart fainted within her at the suggested fear.

### CHAPTER III.

THEY were together in the library at Chavasse Grange, Lady Chavasse and her only son, Geoffry. It was early morning: they had sat in the breakfast-room, making a show of partaking of the morning meal, each of them with that bitter trouble at the heart that had been known only—to my lady, at least—since the previous day. But the farce of speaking in monosyllables to one another could not be kept up: the trouble had to be dealt with, and without delay; and when the poor meal could no longer be prolonged by any artifice, Sir Geoffry held open the door for his mother to pass through, and crossed the hall with her to the library. Shut within its thick walls, they could discuss the secret in safety: no eye to see them, no ear to hear.

Sir Geoffry mechanically stirred the fire, and placed a chair for his mother near it. The weather appeared to be changing. Instead of the unseasonable relaxing warmth, that had been upon the earth up to the previous day, a cold north-east wind had set in, enough to freeze people's marrow. The skies were gray and lowering; the trees shook and moaned; winter was taking up his place again.

So much the better. Blue skies and brightness would hardly have accorded with Sir Geoffry's spirit. He might have to endure many cruel visitations ere he died, but never a one so cruel as this. No evil that heaven can send upon us, or man

inflict, is so hard to bear as self-reproach. If ever a son had idolized a mother, it had surely been Sir Geoffry Chavasse. They had been knit together in the strongest bonds of filial love. His whole thought from his boyhood had been her comfort: to have sacrificed himself for her, if needs must, would have been a cheerful task. When he came of age, only some nine or ten months ago, he had resolved that his whole future life should be devoted to promote her happiness—as her life had been devoted to him in the days of his sickly boyhood. Her wishes were his; her word his law; he would have died rather than cause her a moment's pain.

And how had he, even thus early, fulfilled this? Look at him, as he leans against the heavy frame-work of the window, drawn back from it that the light may not fall on his subdued face. The brow is bent in grievous doubt; the dark blue eyes, generally so honestly clear, are hot with trouble; the bright hair hangs limp. Yes; he would have rather died than bring his mother pain; that was his true creed and belief; but, like many another whose resolves are made in all good faith, he had signally failed, even while he was thinking it, and brought it to her in a crushing heap. He hated himself as he looked at her pale countenance; at the traces of tears in her heavy eyes. Never a minute's sleep had she had the previous

night; it was plain to be seen; and, as for him, he had paced his chamber until morning; not attempting to go to rest. But there was a task close before him, heavier than any that had gone before; heavier even than this silent repentance—the deciding *what* was to be done in the calamity; and Sir Geoffry knew that his duty to his mother and his duty to another would clash. All the past night he had been earnestly trying to decide which of the two might be evaded with the least sin; and he thought he saw which.

Lady Chavasse had taken the chair he placed for her; sat upright in it, waiting for him to speak. She knew as well as he, that this next hour would decide their fate in life; whether they should still be together, a loving mother and son; or whether they should become estranged and separate forever. He crossed to the fire-place and put his elbow on the mantle-piece, shielding his eyes with his hand. Just a few words, he said, of his sense of shame and sorrow; of regret that he should have brought this dishonor on his mother's home; of hope that he might be permitted, by heaven and circumstances, to work out his repentance, in endeavoring daily, hourly, constantly, to atone to her for it—to her, his greatly-loved mother. And then, lifting his face from the hand that had partially hidden it—he asked her to be patient, and to hear him without interruption a little further. And Lady Chavasse bowed her head in acquiescence.

"Nothing remains for me, but to marry Miss Layne," he began: and my lady, as she heard the expected avowal, bit her compressed lips. "It is the only course open; unless I would forfeit every claim to honor, and to the respect of upright men. If you will give your consent to this, the evil may be in a degree repaired;

nothing need ever be known; her good name may be saved—mine, too, if it comes to that—and we may be all eventually happy together——"

"Do not try me too much, Geoffry," came the low interruption.

"Mother, you signified that you would hear me to the end. I will not try you more than I can help; but it is necessary that I should speak fully. All last night I was walking about my room in self-commune; deliberating what way was open, if any, that it would be practicable to take—and I saw but this one. Let me marry her. It will be easy of accomplishment—speaking in reference to appearances and the world. She might go for a week or two to her mother's; for a month or two, if it were thought better and less suspicious, there is no pressing hurry. We could then be married quietly and go abroad for a year or so; or for longer; and come back together to the Grange, and be your dutiful and loving children always, just as it was intended I and Rachel should be. But that you have liked Mary Layne very much, I might have felt more difficulty in proposing this."

"I have liked her as my servant," said Lady Chavasse, scornfully.

"Pardon me, you have liked her as a lady. Do you remember once saying—it was when she first came—that if you had had a daughter you could have wished her to be like Mary Layne? Before I ever saw her, you told me she was a sweet, elegant young woman: and—mother, she is nothing less. Oh, mother mother!" continued Sir Geoffry with emotion, "if you will but forget your prejudices for my sake, and consent, we would endeavor to be ever repaying you in love and services during our after-life. I know what a great sacrifice it will be;



but for my sake I venture to ask it of you; for my sake."

A great fear lay upon Lady Chavasse: it had lain on her ever since the previous day—that he might carry this marriage out of his own will. So that she dare not answer too imperatively. She was bitterly hurt, and caught up her breath with a sob.

"Do you want to kill me, Geoffry?"

"Heaven knows that I wish I had been killed before I brought this distress upon you," was his rejoinder.

"I *am* distressed. I have never felt anything like it since your father died. No; not once when you, a child, of seven, were given over in illness, and it was thought you would not live till morning."

Sir Geoffry passed his hand hastily across his eyes, in which stood the hot tears. His heart was sore, nearly unto breaking; his ingratitude to his mother seemed fearfully great. He longed to throw himself at her feet, and clasp her knees, and tell how deep for her was his love, and that it always would be.

"Had the whole world united to deceive me, Geoffry, I had never believed that you would. Why did you pretend to be fond of Rachel?"

"I never pretended to be fonder of Rachel than I was. I liked her as a cousin; nothing more. I know it now. And—mother"—he added with a flush upon his face and a dropping of the voice, "it is better and safer that the knowledge should have come to me before our marriage than after."

"Nonsense," said Lady Chavasse. "Once married, a man of right principles is always safe in them."

Sir Geoffry was silent. Not very long ago, he had thought himself safe in his. With every word, it seemed that his shame and his sin came more glaringly home to him.

"Then you mean to tell me that you do not like Rachel——"

"That I have no love for her. If—if there be any one plea that I can put forth as a faint shadow of excuse for what has happened, it lies in my love for another. Faint it is, heaven knows: the excuse, not the love. *That* is deep enough: but I would rather not speak of it to you—my mother."

"And that you never will love Rachel?" continued Lady Chavasse, as though he had not interposed.

"Never. It is impossible that I can ever love any one but Mary Layne. I am thankful, as things have turned out, that I did not deceive Rachel by feigning what I could not feel. We were told to consider ourselves betrothed; and did so accordingly; but, so far as love goes, it has not been so much as mentioned between us."

"What else have you to say?" asked Lady Chavasse.

"I might say a great deal, but it would all come round to the same point; to the one petition that I am beseeching you to grant. That you will sanction the marriage."

Lady Chavasse's hands trembled visibly within their rich lace falls, as they lay passive on her soft dress of fine geranium cashmere. Her lips grew white with agitation.

"Geoffry!"

"My darling mother."

"I have heard you. Will you hear me?"

"You know I will."

"More than one-and-twenty years ago, my husband died within these walls; and I—I was not eighteen, Geoffry—felt utterly desolate. But, as the weeks went on, I said my child will be born, if God permit, and he will bring me comfort. You

were born, Geoffrey; you did bring me comfort: such comfort that I thought heaven had come again. You best know, my son, what our life has been; how we have loved each other; how pleasantly time has flown in uninterrupted happiness. I have devoted myself, my time, my energies, all I possessed, to you, my best treasure; I have given up the world for you, Geoffrey; I had only you left in it. Is it fit that you should throw me from you now; that you should blight my remaining days with misery; that you should ignore me just as though I were already dead—and all for the sake of a stranger?"

"But——"

"I have not finished, Geoffrey. For the sake of a stranger, whom a few months ago neither you nor I had ever seen? If you think this: if you deem that you would be acting rightly, and can find in your heart to treat me so, why you must do it."

"But what I wish and propose, is quite different," he exclaimed in agony. "Oh mother, surely you can understand me—and the dilemma I am placed in?"

"I understand all perfectly."

"Ah, yes."

"Geoffrey, there is no middle course. You must choose between me and—*her*. Once she and I separate—it will be to-day—we can never meet again. I will never tolerate her memory; I will never submit to the degradation of hearing her named in my presence. Our paths lie asunder, Geoffrey, far as the two poles: hers one way, mine another. *You* must decide for yourself which of them you will follow. If it be mine, you shall be, as ever, my dear and honored son, and I will never, never reproach you with your folly; never revert to it; never think of it. If it be hers, why then—I will go away some-

where and hide myself, and leave the Grange free for you. And I—I dare say I shall not live long to be a thorn in your remembrance."

She broke down in a flood of bitter sobs. Geoffrey Chavasse had never seen his mother shed such. The hour was as trying to her as to him. She had loved him with a strangely selfish love, as it is in the nature of mothers to do; and that she should have to bid him choose between her and another—and one so entirely beneath her as Lady Chavasse considered Mary Layne to be—was gall and wormwood. Never had she stooped to put the choice before him, even in words, but for her dread that he might be intending to take it.

"It is a fitting end, Geoffrey—that this worthless girl should supplant me in your home and heart," she was resuming, when her emotion allowed; but Sir Geoffrey stood forward to face her, his agitation great as her own.

"An instant, mother; that you may fully understand me. The duty I owe you, the allegiance and the love, are paramount to all else on earth. Communing with myself last night, as I tell you I did, my heart and my reason alike showed me this. If I must choose between you and Mary Layne, there cannot be a question in my own mind on which side duty lies. In all honor I am bound to make her my wife, and I should do it in all affection: but not in defiance of you; not to thrust rudely aside the love and obligations of the past one-and-twenty years. *You* must choose for me. If you refuse your approval, I have no resource but to yield to your decision; if you consent, I shall thank you and bless you forever."

A spasm of pain passed across the mouth of Lady Chavasse. She could not help saying something that arose promi-

nently in her mind ; though it interrupted the question.

"And you can deem the apothecary Layne's daughter fit to mate with Sir Geoffry Chavasse?"

"No I do not," replied Sir Geoffry. "Under ordinary circumstances, I should never have thought of such a thing. This unhappy business has a sting on all sides of it for me, mother. Will you give me your decision?" he added, after a pause.

"I have already given it, Geoffry—so far as I am concerned. You must choose between your mother, between all the hopes and the home-interests of one-and-twenty years, and this alien stranger."

"Then I have no alternative."

She turned her gaze steadily upon him. A sob rose in his throat as he took her hands, his voice was hoarse with emotion.

"To part from her will be like parting with life, mother. I can never know happiness again in this world."

But the decision was irrevocable. What further passed between Sir Geoffry and his mother in the remaining half-hour they spent together : how much of entreaty and anguish was spoken on his side, how much of passionate plaint and sorrow on hers, will never be known. But she was obdurate to the last letter : and Sir Geoffry's lot in life was fixed. Mary Layne was to be sacrificed : and, in one sense of the word, himself also : and there might be no appeal.

Lady Chavasse exacted from him that he should quit the Grange at once without seeing Miss Layne, and not return to it until Mary had left it forever. Anything he wished to say to her, he was to write. On Lady Chavasse's part, she voluntarily undertook to explain to Miss Layne their conversation faithfully, and its result ; and to shield the young lady's good name from the censure of the world.

She would keep her for some time longer at the Grange, be tender with her, honor her, drive out with her in the carriage that they might be seen together, mollify her mother's anger, persuade Mr. Luke Duffham that his opinion had been mistaken, and, in any case, bind him down to secrecy : in short, she would make future matters as easy as might be for Mary, as tenaciously as though she were her own daughter. That she promised this at the sacrifice of pride and of much feeling, was indisputable ; but she meant to keep her word.

However miserable a night the others had passed, it will readily be imagined that Mary Layne had spent a worse. She made no pretence of eating breakfast ; and when it was taken away sat at her work in the garden parlor, trying to do it ; but her cold fingers dropped the needle every minute, her aching brow felt as though it were bursting. Good-hearted Hester Picker was sorry to see her look so ill, and wished the nasty trying spring, hot one day, cold the next, would just settle itself down.

Mary rose from her chair, and went up stairs to her own bedroom for a brief respite ; in her state of mind it seemed impossible to stay long quiescent anywhere. This little incidental occurrence frustrated one part of the understanding between Sir Geoffry and his mother, that he should quit the house without seeing Miss Layne. In descending, she chanced to cross the end of the corridor just as he came out of his mother's room after bidding her farewell. The carriage waited at the door, his coat was on his arm. Mary would have shrunk back again, but he bade her wait.

"You must allow me to shake her hand, and say just a word of adieu, mother ; I am not quite a brute," he whis-

pered. And Lady Chavasse came out of her room, and tacitly sanctioned it.

But there was literally nothing more than a hand-shake. Miss Layne, standing still in all humility, turned a little white, for she guessed that he was being sent from his home through her. Sir Geoffry held her hand for a moment.

"I am going away, Mary. My mother will explain to you. I have done my best, and failed. Before Heaven, I have striven to the uttermost, for your sake and for mine; but it is not to be. I leave you to my mother; she is your friend; and you shall hear from me in a day or two. I am now going to see Mrs. Layne. Good-bye: God bless you always!"

But, ere Sir Geoffry reached the hall, Lady Chavasse had caught him, and was drawing him into a room. The fear had returned to her face.

"I heard you say you were going to call on the Widow Lane. Geoffry, this must not be."

"Not be!" he repeated in surprise. "Mother, I am obeying you in all essential things; but you cannot wish to reduce me to an utter craven. I owe an explanation to Mrs. Layne almost in the same degree that I owe it to you; and I shall certainly not quit Church Dykely until I have given it."

"Oh, well—if it must be," she conceded, afraid still. "You—you surely will not be drawn-in to act against me, Geoffry?"

"No power on earth could draw me to that. You have my first and best allegiance; to which I bow before every consideration, before every interest, whether of my own or others. But for that, should I be acting as I now am? Fare you well, mother."

She heard the carriage door closed; she heard Sir Geoffry's orders to the footman.

Even for that order he was cautious to give a plausible excuse.

"Stop at Mrs. Layne's. I have to leave a message from her ladyship."

The wheels of the carriage crunched the gravel, bearing off Sir Geoffry in the storm of sleet—which had begun to fall—and Lady Chavasse passed up the stairs again. Taking the hand of Mary—who had stood above like a statue, never moving—she led her, gently enough, into her dressing-room, and put her in a comfortable chair by the fire, and prepared for this second interview.

Briefly, Lady Chavasse recounted what she had to say. Sir Geoffry had found himself obliged to choose between Miss Layne and her, his mother. Mary Layne sat with her hands before her face, and acknowledged that, if it came to such a choice, he had chosen rightly. And then, in forcible language, because it came from her heart, my lady drew a picture of the life-long happiness she and her son had enjoyed together, of her devotion and sacrifices for him, of his deep love and reverence for her; and she quietly asked Mary to put herself in imagination in her place, and say what her feelings would have been had a stranger came in to mar this. Had she any right to do this? Lady Chavasse asked her; would she be justified in destroying the ties of a life, in thrusting herself between mother and son?—in invoking a curse, his mother's curse, on him? My lady did not spare her; but she spoke in no angry tone, rather in a piteous and imploring one; and Mary, feeling as if matters were put to her own better feeling, sobbed, and shook, and shrunk within herself, and could have knelt at Lady Chavasse's feet for pardon in her distress and humiliation.

And that was the end of this wretched business—as Duffham phrases it in his

diary—so far as the Grange and its people were concerned.

Mary stayed, perforce, two or three weeks longer at the house, and my lady made much of her; she took her out daily in her carriage; she said to her friends, in the hearing of her servants and the sympathizing Hester Picker, how vexatious it was that the relaxing, unseasonable weather had brought out the delicacy that was latent in Miss Layne's constitution, and that she feared she must let her go away somewhere for a change. Mary submitted to all. She was in that self-abased frame of mind that had my lady desired her to immolate herself on a blazing pyre, she would have gone to it meekly. My lady had interviews with Mrs. Layne, and with Duffham (who had got well then) and with his brother Luke.

At the two or three weeks' end, Miss Elizabeth Layne came by appointment to the Grange, and she and Mary were driven to the nearest station in my lady's own

carriage on their way to the seaside, or to elsewhere, as it might be; and never an ill breath—in the Grange or out of it—transpired to tarnish the fair fame of Mary Layne.

But my lady was not honest in one respect. The letter that arrived for Mary from Sir Geoffrey a day or two after his departure was never given to her. My lady knew she might trust her son implicitly; he could but be straightforward and keep his word in all things; nevertheless, she deemed the fire the safest place for the thick epistle of many sheets. On the other hand, Mary wrote to Sir Geoffrey, saying that the alternative he had chosen was the only one possible to him. Nothing, no prayers of his, she said, would have induced her to put herself between him and his mother, even had he so far forgotten his duty as to urge it. It was a good and sensible letter, and none but a good and unselfish girl could have written it. So that ended the dream and the romance.

#### CHAPTER IV.

CLOSE upon the time that Mary Layne quitted Chavasse Grange—having closed all connection with it, never to be to it henceforth but as an utter stranger—her eldest sister, Susan, the wife of Captain Richard Layne, arrived from India with her children, four little ones; the eldest seven years old, the youngest eighteen months. The children had been ailing, and she brought them over for a twelvemonth's change. Mrs. Layne was a good deal worn herself, for the only nurse she had with her, a colored woman, was sea-sick nearly all the voyage. Her

sister Eleanor, who originally went out with her to Calcutta, had made an excellent match; having married Allan McAlpin, the younger partner in the staid old firm of McAlpin Brothers, merchants of high standing, and wealthy men. The first thing Mrs. Layne did on arrival, was to establish herself in lodgings in Liverpool (so as to rest a week or two from the fatigues of the voyage) and send for her mother and sister Elizabeth. In answer came a letter from her mother, saying she was not equal to the journey and that Elizabeth was from home. It contained

Elizabeth's present address, and also one or two items of news that startled young Mrs. Layne well nigh out of her senses. Leaving her children to their nurse's care, she started for the address given, and found her two sisters, Elizabeth and Mary. The one living in a chronic state of outpouring sarcasm and reproach; the other meekly taking all as not a tithe of her just due.

After a day or two given to natural grief and lamentation, Mrs. Richard Layne took matters into her own capable hands. She considered that a more complete change would be good for Mary, and decided to convey her to the continent. She wrote a long and confidential letter to her husband in India, of what she meant to do: and then she went back to Liverpool with Elizabeth, to leave the latter in charge of her own children and their colored nurse, during her absence across the channel. Mrs. Layne then went back to Mary, and they started together for France.

Shortly after this, old Mrs. Layne fell ill: and Elizabeth, when she found she must go home in consequence, left a responsible English nurse with the colored woman and children. Some months afterward Mrs. Richard Layne and Mary returned from abroad; and at the end of the twelvemonth they all went back to India—Mrs. Layne, her children, the native nurse, and Mary. Mary accompanied them in the capacity of governess.

After that, a couple of years went on.

*From Miss Mary Layne's Journal.*

June 10.—Cool of the evening. Susan came to the school-room in the midst of the geography lesson this morning, and told me an old friend of mine had called and I was to come into the verandah to

see her. I never was more surprised. It was Jane Arkill; my chief friend in our old school days. She was married to a Mr. Cale, a doctor, who has come out here to practice. Mrs. Cale says she will never get reconciled to the heat. While she sat telling us home news, she alternately wiped her pale face, and stared at me, because I am so much altered. She thinks she should not have known me. It is not that my features have changed, she says, but that I have grown so much graver, and look so old. When people talk like this, I long to tell them that things have changed me; that I have passed through a fiery trial of sin and suffering; that my life is one long crucifixion of inward, silent repentance. When I first came out, two years ago, and people would say, "It must be the climate that is making Miss Layne look so ill," it seemed to me like the worst hypocrisy to let them think it was the climate, and not to tell the truth. This feeling came back again to-day, when Jane Arkill—I shall often forget to call her "Cale"—said my eyes had grown to have a sad look in them; and Susan answered that young ladies faded quickly in India, and Mary *would* apply herself too closely to the children's studies in spite of remonstrance. Too closely! Why, if I devoted every hour of my life, night and day, to these dear children, I could never repay what their mother—or their father either—has done for me.

My mother is very well, Jane says, but lame and cannot get about much: she saw her only six weeks ago!—for they came out overland. Only six weeks ago!—to hear that one has seen my dear mother so recently as that, makes it seem almost as though I had seen her but yesterday. My darling mother!—whom I so grieved and outraged at the time, and who was so quick to forgive me and do so much for

me. What a message she has sent me! "Give my love to dear Mary, and say I hope she is happy with her sisters." Elizabeth, too, sent me her love.

"I saw your little Arthur, Mrs. Layne." Jane Cale then said to my sister: "he is a sweet little fellow; your mother and Elizabeth are so fond of him. They call him Baby Arthur." I felt my face growing whiter than death; but Susan, who was never I believe put out in her life, quietly sent me away with a message to the nurse—that she might bring the children. When I got back, Captain Layne had come in and had the baby on his shoulder: for nurse had made more haste than I. "None of your children here are so fair as the little one your wife left in England, Captain Layne," Jane Cale was saying, as she looked at them one by one. "You mean little Arthur," returned the Captain in his ready kindness; "I hear he is fair." "Have you never seen him?" "No: how should I have seen him?" asked Captain Layne, laughing: "he was born over there, and my wife left him behind her as a legacy to her mother. It is rather a hazard, Mrs. Cale, to bring out very young infants to this country." Susan came to the rescue: she took the baby and put him on his feet, that Mrs. Cale should see how well he walked for his twelve-month's age. But it did not answer. No doubt Jane thought that the more she told them about Baby Arthur in England, the better pleased they would be. How much difference was there, she asked, between this child and little Arthur—eighteen months?—and how much between Arthur and the one above him? "O," said the Captain, "if it comes to months, you must ask my wife. Come here, sir," he called to Robert, who was tumbling over the little black bearer, "tell this lady how old *you* are, for I'm

sure I can't." "I'm over four," lis Bobby. "Ah, I see," said Jane. "Baby Arthur is just between the" "Exactly so," said Captain Layne: "san, I think these children may g their own quarters now." They wer once, for I have trained them to be of ent, and I escaped with them. It is first time any human tongue has sp to me of Baby Arthur. I think if ( tain Layne had looked at me, I sh have died: but he is ever kind. Ne by so much as a word, or look, or t since the hour when I first set foot these shores, his wife's humbled si his children's meek governess—and more than good of him to intrust t training to *me*!—never has he betr that he as much as knew anything, less thought of it.

Oh, how events have been soothed me! how much more than I deserve I to be thankful for!

*Letter from Captain Layne's Wife to Mother at Church Dykely.*

SEPTEMBER

MY DARLING MOTHER: I am sil down to answer your letter which arr by last mail: for I am sure you wonder at my long silence and think age since I wrote. But the truth have had a touch of my old complai intermittent fever—and it left me weak and languid. I know you hav untiring correspondent in Eleanor. haps that makes me a little neglig writing home, though I am aware it o not.

We were truly glad to welcome Cale, because she had so recently from you. I cannot say that I have much of her as yet, for it was just she got out that my illness began;

When I grew better my husband sent me the hills for a change. Mary went with me and the children. She is the greatest comfort. Mother dear, in spite of what we know of, I do not think Mary has her equal for true worth in this world. You say that Mrs. Cale, in writing home to me, described Mary as being so altered; sad and subdued. Why, my dear mother, of course she is sad: how could she be otherwise? I do not suppose, in my more recent life, she has ever felt sadder than the most intense sadness of my mind; no, not for one minute: and it is only to be expected that this must in time show itself in the countenance. I spoke to her about it one day; it is a long, long while ago now; saying I did not like to see her retain so much sadness. "It cannot be helped," she answered; "sadness must always follow sin."

And now I must tell you, even at the risk of being misunderstood—though I am sure you know me too well to fear I should seek to countenance or excuse wrongdoing—that I think Mary takes an exaggerated view of the past. She seems to think it can never be wiped out—never be alliated. Of course, in one sense, it never can; but I don't see why she need continue to feel this intense humiliation, as if she ought to have a cordon drawn round her gown to warn all good folks off its contact. Look again at that persistence of hers, always to wear black: it is the writing about her gown puts me in mind of it. Black, black, black: thin silk when the heat will allow—oftener a dreary, black-looking kind of soft muslin that is called here "black jaconite;" but I really don't know whether that's the way to spell the thing. During the late intense heat we have talked her into a black-and-white muslin; that is, white, with huge black spots upon it in the form of a melon. Only

once did I speak to her about wearing white, as we do; I have never ventured since. She turned away with a shiver, and said white was no longer for her. Mother dear, if any one ever lived to work out on earth their repentance for sin, surely it is Mary. The more I see of her innate goodness, the less can I understand the past. With her upright principles and strict sense of conscientiousness—and you know, mother dear, that Mary always had these even as a child—I am unable to imagine how it could have been that — But I won't go into that. And, it may be, that the goodness, so remarkable, would not have come out conspicuously but for the trial.

Mrs. Cale gave us such a nice account of "Baby Arthur." She says he is very fair and pretty. She has talked to other people about him, and of course we cannot tell her not to. A brother officer of my husband's said to me yesterday, "I hear your little boy at home is charming, Mrs. Layne. When shall you have him out?" "Not yet," I answered, "he was a very delicate baby, and I should not like to risk it." "Ah," said Major Grant, "that is why you left him in England." "My mother takes great care of him," I went on, "it would break her heart if I were to bring him away from her."

You will wonder at my writing all this, but it is so new a thing to hear "Baby Arthur" made a topic of discussion, and all through Mrs. Cale! Talking of children—Eleanor is, I think, getting somewhat over her long-continued disappointment. Four years she has been married, and has none. It is certainly a pity, when she and Allan McAlpin are so well off. Not a family in Calcutta lives in better style than they; people here talk of the house of McAlpin Brothers as we at home talk of Rothschild's and Baring's. I am



sure they must be very rich, and poor Eleanor naturally thinks where is the use of the riches when there's no child to leave them to. Eleanor said to me the other day when she was here, "You might as well make over that child of yours to me, Susan," meaning Baby Arthur; "he does you no good, and must be a trouble to mamma and Elizabeth." Of course I laughed it off; saying that you and Elizabeth would not part with him for untold gold. And I believe it is so, is it not, dear mother? Do you remember when I first went to your house with the poor little infant, you took him out of my arms with a jerk and an averted face, as if you'd rather have pitched him on the floor, and Elizabeth turned away and groaned?—"Mother," I said, "you may get to love the child in time, and then you'll be more ready to forgive and forget." And that has come to pass.

Mary has always been against our not telling the truth to Eleanor; she says, even yet, that she feels like a hypocrite before her; but I feel sure it was best and wisest. Eleanor is as sensitive in her way as Mary is; Eleanor holds a high position in the place; she and her husband are both courted—she for herself, he for his riches, for his high commercial name, for his integrity; and I know she would have *felt* the slur almost as keenly as Mary. It is true I do not like deliberate deceit, but there was really no need to tell her; it would not have answered any good end. Until Mrs. Cale talked, Eleanor scarcely remembered that there was a Baby Arthur; and now she seems quite jealous that he is mine and she cannot have him. I say to Eleanor that she must be contented with the good she has—her indulgent husband, her fine position. We poor officers' wives cannot compete with her in grandeur. By the way,

talking of officers, you will be glad to hear that my husband expects his majority. It will be a welcome rise. For with our little ones and the expenses we have to keep up, it is rather difficult at times to make both ends meet. We shall come into money some time from the West Indies; but until then every pound of additional pay is welcome.

Mrs. Cale told us another item of news: that is, she recounted it amidst the rest, little thinking what it was to us. That Sir G. C. is married and living with his wife at the Grange with Lady C. You have been keeping the fact back, dear mother, either through not choosing to mention their names, or out of consideration for Mary. But I can assure you she was *thankful* to hear of it—it has removed a little of the abiding sting from her life. You cannot imagine how unselfish she is; she looks upon herself as the sole cause of all that occurred. I mean to say, that she says it was through her going to the Grange. Had she not gone, the peace of mother and son would never have been disturbed. I think Lady C. was *selfish* and *wrong*; that she ought to have allowed Sir G. to do as he wished. Mary says no; that Lady C's comfort and her life-long feelings were above every other consideration. She admires Lady C. more than I do. However, she is truly glad to hear that the marriage took place. Events have fallen now into their original course, and she trusts that the bitter episode in which she took part may be gradually forgotten at the Grange. The night we first heard of it, I went hastily—and I fear you will say rudely—into Mary's room when she was preparing for rest, having omitted to tell her something I wished changed in Nelly's studies for the morning. She was on her knees, and rose up; the tears were literally streaming down her sweet face. "Oh

"Mary, what is the matter?" I asked, in a shock of dismay. "I was but praying for God to bless them," she answered simply. "Is she not a good, unselfish girl?"

I could fill a page with her praises. What she has been to my children, during these two years she has had them in charge, I can never tell. She insisted upon being regarded and treated wholly as a governess; but, as my husband says, no real governess could be half so painstaking, untiring and conscientious. She has earned the respect of all Calcutta, and she shrinks from it as if it were something to be shunned, saying, "If people did but know!" Nelly, from being the only girl, and perhaps also because she was the eldest and her papa loved her so, was the most tiresome, spoiled little animal in the world; and the boys were boisterous, and I am afraid frightfully impudent to the native servants; but since Mary took them in hand they are altogether different—fit to be loved. The captain often says he wishes he could recompense her.

And now I must bring my letter to a close, or you will be tired. The children all send their love to grandmamma and Aunt Elizabeth; and (it is Miss Nelly calls out this) to little brother Arthur. Nelly is growing prettier every day; she is now going on for eleven. Richard promises to be as tall and fine a man as his father. I believe he is to be sent home next year to the school attached to King's College, in London. Little Bobby is more delicate than I like to see him; Allan a frightful Turk; baby a dear little fellow. Master Allan's godfather, Eleanor's husband, gave him a handsome present on his last birthday—a railway train that would "go." He had sent for it from England. I am sure it never cost less than five pounds; and the naughty child broke it before the day was out. I felt so vexed,

and downright ashamed to confess it to Eleanor. The Ayah said he broke it for the purpose "to see what it was made of," and in spite of entreaties to the contrary, Richard was on the point of whipping him for the mischief, and Allan was roaring in anticipation when Mary interposed, and begged to be let deal with him for it. What she said, or what she did, I don't know; I'm sure there was no whipping; but Master Allan was in a penitential and subdued mood for days after it, voluntarily renouncing some pudding that he is uncommonly fond of, because he had "not been good." Richard says that he would rather trust his children to Mary, to be made what they ought to be, than to any one under heaven. Oh, it is grievous—that her life should have been blighted!

My best love to you and Elizabeth, dearest mother, in which Richard begs to join; and believe me your affectionate daughter,  
SUSAN LAYNE.

P. S.—I have never before written openly on these private matters, we have been content tacitly to ignore them to each other; but somehow my pen has run on incautiously. Please, therefore, to burn this letter when you and Elizabeth shall have read it.\*

*From Miss Mary Layne's Journal, about two years later.*

October 9.—I quite tremble at the untoward turn things seem to be taking. To think that a noble gentleman should be casting his thoughts on me! And he is a gentleman, and a noble one, also, in spite of that vain young adjutant, St.

\*But old Mrs. Layne did not burn it—or else it would never have found its way into Duffham's collection. She was content to put it off from day to day, just as people do put off things; and it was never done. J. L.

George's, slighting remark when Mr. McAlpin came in last night—"Here's that confounded old warehouseman!" It was well the major did not hear him. He has to take St. George to task on occasion, and he would have done it then with a will!

Andrew McAlpin is not an ordinary man. Head of a wealthy house, whose integrity has never been questioned; himself of unsullied honor, of handsome presence, of middle age, for surely in his three-and-fortieth year he may be called it—owner of all these solid advantages, he has actually turned his attentions upon me! Me! Oh, if he did but know!—if he could but see the humiliation it brings to this already too humiliated heart!

Has a glamour been cast over his sight as they say in his own land? Can he not see how I shrink from people when they notice me by chance more than common? Does he not see how constantly I have tried to shrink from *him*? If I thought that this had been brought about by any want of precaution on my part, I should be doubly miserable. When I was assistant-teacher at school in England, the French governess, poor old Madame de Visme, confided to me something that she was in the habit of doing; it was nothing wrong in itself, but totally opposed to the arbitrary rules laid down, and, if discovered, might have caused her to be abruptly dismissed. "But suppose it were found out, madame?" I said. "Ah non, mon enfant," she answered, "je prends mes précautions." Since then I have often thought of the words: and I say to myself, now as I write, have I taken proper precautions? I can hardly tell. For one thing I was so totally unprepared: it would no more have entered my mind to suppose Mr. McAlpin would think of paying attention to me, than that the empty-

headed Lieutenant St. George—who boasts that his family is better than anybody's in India, and intends to wed accordingly if he weds at all—would.

When it first began—and that is so long ago that I can scarcely remember, nearly a year, though—Mr. McAlpin would talk to me about the children. I felt proud to answer him, dear little things; and I knew he liked them, and Allan is his brother's godchild, and Robert is Eleanor's. I am afraid I was wrong there: when he would come talking, evening after evening, I should have been on my guard and begged Susan to excuse me from appearing as often as she would. The great evil lies in my having consented to appear at all in company. For two years after I came out—oh, more than that; it must have been nearly three—I resolutely refused to join them when they were not alone. It was Major Layne's fault that the rule was broken through. One day, while invitations were out for an evening party, Susan came to me and said that the Major particularly requested I would appear at it. "The fact is, Mary, she whispered, "there has been some talk at the mess: you are very much admired, your face, I mean, and some of them began wondering whether there was any reason for your never appearing in society; and whether you could really be my sister. Richard was not present—that goes without telling it—but the Colonel told him of it afterward in a joking way. But what the Major says is this, Mary—That he knows India and tongues better than you do, and he desires for all our sakes, for yours of course especially, that you will now and then show yourself with us. You are to begin with next Tuesday evening. Richard *begs* you will. And I have been getting you a black net dress, with a little

white lace for the body—you cannot say that's too fine." The words "for all our sakes" decided it; and I said I would certainly obey Major Layne. What else could I do?

That was the beginning of it. Though I go out scarcely ever with the Major and Susan, declining invitations on the plea of my duties as governess, it has certainly grown into a habit with me to spend my evenings with them when they are at home.

But I never supposed anything like this would come of it. It has always seemed to me as if the world could see me a little as I see myself, and not think of me as one eligible to be chosen. As soon as I suspected that Mr. McAlpin came here for me, I strove to show him as plainly as I might that he was making a mistake. And now this proves, as it seems to me, how wrong it was not to tell my sad story to Eleanor; but to let her think of me as one worthy yet. Susan knows how much against it I was: but she and her husband overruled me. Eleanor would have whispered it to her husband, and he might have whispered to his brother Andrew; and this new perplexity have been spared. It is not for my own sake I am so sorry, but for his: crosses and vexations are only my due, and I try to take them patiently: but I grow hot with shame every time I think how he is deceived. Oh, if he would but speak out, and end it!—that I might thank him and tell him it is impossible: I would like to say unfit. Susan might give him a hint: but when I urge her to do so she laughs at me and asks How can she, until he has spoken.

*October 24.*—It has come at last. Mr. McAlpin, one of the best amidst the honorable men of the world, has asked me to become his wife. While I was trying to

answer him, I burst into tears. We were quite alone. "Why do you weep?" he asked; and I answered that I thought it was because of my gratitude to him for his kindness, and because I was so unworthy of it. It was perhaps a hazardous thing to say—but I was altogether confused. I must have explained myself badly, for he could not, or would not, understand my refusal; he said he certainly should decline to take it; I must consider it well—for a week—or a month—as long as I liked, provided I said Yes at last. When the crying fit was over, I felt all myself again; and I told him, just as quietly and calmly as I could speak, that I should never marry; never. He asked *why*, and as I was hesitating what reason to give, and praying to be helped to speak right in the emergency, we were interrupted.

Oh, if I could but tell him the naked truth, as I here write it! That the only one living man it would be possible for me to marry, is separated from me wider than seas can separate. The barrier was flung up between us years ago, never to be overstepped by either: while at the same time it shut me out from my kind. For this reason I can never marry; and never shall marry so long as the world, for me, endures.

*November 19.*—This is becoming painful. Mr. McAlpin will not give me up. He is all consideration and respect, he is not obtrusive, but yet—he will not give me up. There can exist no good reason why I should not have him, he says; and he is willing to wait for months and years. Eleanor comes in with her remonstrances. "Whatever possesses you, Mary? You must be out of your mind, child, to refuse Andrew McAlpin. For goodness sake get a little common sense into your poor crotchety head." Allan McAlpin, in

his half earnest, half joking way says to me, "Miss Layne, I make a perfect husband; ask Eleanor if I don't; and I know Andrew will make a better." It is so difficult for me to parry these attacks. The children even have taken it up: and Master Richard to-day, in the school-room called me Mrs. McAlpin. Susan has tried to shield me throughout. The Major says not a word one way or the other.

A curious idea has come across me once or twice lately—that it might be almost better to give Mr. McAlpin a hint of the truth. Of course it is *but* an idea; one that can never be carried out; but I know that he would be true as steel. I cannot bear for him to think me ungrateful: and he must consider me both ungrateful and capricious. I respect him and like him very much, and he sees this: if I were at liberty as others are, I would gladly marry him: the great puzzle is, how to make him understand that it is not possible. I suppose the consciousness of my secret, which never leaves me, renders it more difficult for me to be decisive than it would be if I possessed none. Not the least painful part of it all is, that he brings me handsome presents, and will not take them back again. He is nearly old enough to be my father, he says, and so I must consider them as given me in that light. How shall I say it? how convince him!

*November 29.*—Well, I have done it. Last night there was a grand dinner at the mess; some strangers were to join it on invitation; Susan went to spend a quiet hour with the Colonel's wife, and Mr. McAlpin came in, and found me alone. What possessed me, I cannot tell; but I went all over in a tremble. He asked me what was the matter: and I took courage to say that I always now felt distressed to see him come in, knowing he came for my sake, and that I could not respond to him

as he wished. We had never had so serious a conversation as the one that ensued. He begged me to at least tell him what the barrier was, and where it lay. I thought he almost hinted that it was due to him. "There is some particular barrier I feel sure," he said, "although Eleanor tells me there is none." And then I took some more courage, inwardly hoping to be helped to speak for the best, and answered Yes, there *was* a barrier; one that could never be surmounted; and that I had tried to make him see this all along. I told him how truly I esteemed him; how little I felt in my own eyes at being so undeserving of the good opinion of a good man; I said I should thank him for it in my heart forever. Did the barrier lie in my loving another? he asked, and I hesitated there. I *had* loved another, I said: it was before I came out, and the circumstances attending it were very painful; indeed it was a painful story altogether. It had blighted my life: it had isolated me from the world; it entirely prevented me from ever thinking of another. I do believe he gathered from my agitation somewhat of the truth, for he was so kind and gentle. Eleanor knew nothing of it, I said; Major and Mrs. Layne had thought there was no need to tell her: and, of course he would understand that I was speaking to him in confidence. Yes, he answered, in confidence that I should not find misplaced. I felt happier and more at ease with him than I had ever done, for now I knew that misapprehension was over; and we talked together on other matters peacefully, until Major Layne entered and brought a shock with him.

A shock for me. One of the guests at the mess came with him; a naval officer in his uniform; a big man of fifty, with a stern countenance and a cloud of untidy

white hair. "Where's Susan?" cried the Major: "out? Come here, then, Mary: you must be hostess." And before I knew what or who it was, I had been introduced to Admiral Chavasse. My head was in a whirl, my eyes were swimming: I had not heard the name spoken openly for years. Major Layne little thought he was related to G. C. Mr. McAlpin had no idea that this fine naval officer, Parker Chavasse, could be cousin to one of whom I had been speaking covertly, but had, not named. The Admiral is on cruise, has touched at Calcutta, and his vessel is lying in Diamond Harbor.

*November 30.*—Oh dear! oh dear! That I should be the recipient of so much goodness, and not be able to appreciate it!

A message came to the school-room this morning: Miss Layne was wanted down stairs. It was Susan who sent, but I found Mr. McAlpin alone. He had been holding a confidential interview with Susan: and Susan, hearing how much I had said to him last night, confided to him all. Oh, and he was willing to take me still; to take me as I am! I fell down at his feet sobbing when I told him that it could not be.

*Private Note from Major Layne's Wife to her Mother at Church Dykely.*

Just half dozen lines, my dear mother, for your eye alone: I enclose them in my ordinary letter, meant for the world in general, as well as you. Mr. McAlpin

knows *all*; but he was still anxious to make her his wife. He thinks her the best and truest girl, excellent among women. Praise from him is praise. It was, I am certain, a most affecting interview; but they were alone. Mary's refusal—an absolute one—was dictated by two motives. The one is, that the old feelings hold still so much sway in her heart (and, she says, always will) as to render the idea of a union with any one else absolutely distasteful. The other motive was consideration for Andrew McAlpin. "I put it to you what it would be," she said to him, "if at any time after our marriage, whether following closely upon it or in years to come, this story of mine should transpire? I should *die* with shame, with grief for your sake: and there could be no remedy. No, no; never will I subject you, or any one else, to that frightful chance."

And, mother, she is right. In spite of Mr. McAlpin's present disappointment, I know he thinks her so. It has but increased his admiration for her. He said to me, "Henceforth I shall look upon her as a dear young sister, and give her still my heart's best love and reverence."

And this is the private history of the affair: I thought I ought to disclose it to you. Richard says it is altogether an awful pity (he means inclusive of the past), for she's a trump of a girl. And so she is. Ever yours, dear mother.

SUSAN LAYNE.

## CHAPTER V.

IT was a lovely place, that homestead of Chavassee Grange, as seen in the freshness of the summer's morning; and my Lady Chavassee, looking from her window as she dressed, might be thinking so. The green lawn, its dew drops sparkling in the sun, was dotted with beds of many-colored flowers; the thrush and blackbird were singing in the surrounding trees; the far-off landscape stretched around in the distance was beautiful for the eye to rest upon.

Nearly hidden by great clusters of roses, some of which he was plucking, and talking at the same time to the head-gardener who stood by, was a well-looking gentleman of some five-and-twenty years. His light morning coat was flung back from the snowy white waistcoat, across which a gold chain passed, its seal drooping; a blue necktie, just as blue as his blue eyes, was carelessly tied round his neck. He might have been known for a Chavassee by those self-same eyes, for they had been his father's—Sir Peter—before him.

"About those geraniums that you have put out, Markham," he was saying. "How came you to do it? Lady Chavassee is very angry; she wanted them kept in the pots."

"Well, Sir Geoffrey, I only obeyed orders," replied the gardener, who was new to the place. "Lady Rachel told me to do it."

"Lady Rachel did? Oh, very well. Lady Chavassee did not understand that, I suppose."

Up went Lady Chavassee's window at this juncture. "Geoffrey."

Sir Geoffrey stepped out from amid the roses, and smiled as he answered her.

"Ask Markham about the geraniums, Geoffrey—how he could dare do such a thing without orders."

"Mother, Rachel bade him do it. Of course she did not know that you wished it not done."

"Oh," curtly replied Lady Chavassee. And she shut down the window again.

By this it will be seen that the wishes of the two ladies at Chavassee Grange sometimes clashed. Lady Rachel, though perhaps regarded as second in authority, was fond of having her own way, and took it when she could. Lady Chavassee made a show of deferring to her generally; but she had reigned queen so long that she found it irksome, not to say humiliating, to yield the smallest points to her son's wife.

They were sitting down to breakfast when Sir Geoffrey went in, in the room that had once been the garden-parlor. It had been re-embellished since those days, and made the breakfast-room. Lady Chavassee was but in her forty-fourth year; a young woman, so to say, beautiful still, and excellently well-preserved. She wore a handsome dress of green muslin, with a dainty little cap of lace on her rich brown hair. Sir Geoffrey's wife was in white; she looked just the same as when she was Lady Rachel Derreston; her perfect features pale and cold and faultless.

Geoffrey Chavassee laid a rose by the side of each as he sat down. He was the only one changed; changed since the light-hearted days before that episode of sin and care came to the Grange. It had soon passed away again; but somehow it had left its mark on him. His face seemed to have acquired a weary kind of look; and the fair bright hair was getting somewhat

thin upon the temples. Sir Geoffry was in Parliament; but he had now paired off for the very short remainder of the session. Sometimes they were all in London; sometimes Sir Geoffry would be there alone, or only with his wife; the Grange was their chief and usual home.

They began talking of their plans for the day. Sir Geoffry had to ride over some portion of the estate; Lady Rachel thought she must write some letters; Lady Chavasse, who said her head ached, intended to go out in her new carriage.

It was ordered to the door in the course of the morning—this pretty toy carriage, which had been a recent present from Geoffry to his mother. Low and light in build, it was something like a basket chaise, but much more elegant, and the boy-groom, in his natty postillion's dress, sat the horse. Lady Chavasse, a light shawl thrown over her green muslin, and a white bonnet on, stood admiring the turn-out, her maid, who had come out with the parasol, by her side.

"Wilkins," said her ladyship suddenly, "run and ask Lady Rachel whether she is sure she would not like to go with me."

The woman went and returned. "Lady Rachel's love and thanks, my lady, but she would prefer to get her letters done."

So Lady Chavasse went alone, taking the road to Church Dykely. The hedges were blooming with wild roses and woodbine, the sweet scent of the hay filled the air, the sky was blue and cloudless. But the headache was making itself sensibly felt; and my lady, remembering that she had often had these headaches lately, began wondering whether Duffham the surgeon could give her anything to cure them.

"Giles," she cried, leaning forward. And the boy-groom turned and touched his cap.

"My lady?"

"To Mr. Duffham's."

So in the middle of the village, at Mr. Duffham's door, Giles pulled up. The surgeon, seeing who it was, came out, and handed his visitor in.

Lady Chavasse had not enjoyed a gossip with Mr. Duffham since before her last absence from home. She rather liked one in her coldly condescending way. And she stayed with him in the surgery while he made up some medicine for her, and told her all the village news. Then she began talking about her daughter-in-law.

"Lady Rachel seems well, but there is a little fractiousness of temper perceptible now and then; and I fancy that, with some people, it denotes a state of not perfect health. There are *no* children, Mr. Duffham, you see. There are no signs of any."

"Time enough for that, my lady."

"Well, they have been married for—let me recollect—nearly fourteen months. I do hope there will be children! I am anxious that there should be."

The surgeon happened to meet her eyes as she spoke, and read the anxiety seated in them.

"You see, if there were none, and anything happened to Sir Geoffry, it would be the case of the old days—my case over again. Had my child proved to be a girl, the Grange would have gone from us. You do not remember that; you were not here; but your predecessor, Mr. Layne, knew all about it."

Perhaps it was the first time for some three or more years past that Lady Chavasse had mentioned voluntarily the name of Layne to the surgeon. It might have been a slip of the tongue now.

"But there's nothing likely to happen to Sir Geoffry, Lady Chavasse," observed



Duffham, after an imperceptible pause. "He is young and healthy."

"I know all that. Only it would be pleasant to feel we were on the safe side—that there was a son to succeed. I cannot help looking to contingencies; it has been my way to do so all my life."

"Well, Lady Chavasse, I sincerely hope the son will come. Sir Geoffry is anxious on the point, I dare say."

"He makes no sign. Sir Geoffry seems to me to have grown a little indifferent in manner of late, as to general interests. Yesterday afternoon we were talking about making some improvements at the Grange, he and I; Lady Rachel was in-doors at the piano. I remarked that it would cost a good deal of money, and the question was, whether it would be worth while to do it. 'My successor would think it so, no doubt,' cried Sir Geoffry. 'I hope that will never be Parker Chavasse; I should not like him to reign here,' I said. 'If it is mother, I shall not be alive to witness it,' was his unemotional answer."

"Lady Chavasse, considering the difference between the Admiral's age and Sir Geoffry's, I should say there are thirty chances against it," was Duffham's reply, as he began to roll up the bottle of mixture in white paper.

While he was doing this, a clapping of tiny hands attracted Lady Chavasse's attention to the window, which stood open. A little boy had run out of Mrs. Layne's door opposite, and stood on the pavement in admiration of the carriage, which the boy-groom was driving slowly about. It was a pretty child of three years old, or thereabouts, in a brown Holland pinafore strapped round the waist, his little arms, legs and neck bare, his light hair curling.

"Oh, g'andma, look! g'andma, come and look!" he cried, and the words were wafted distinctly to Lady Chavasse.

"Who is that child, Mr. Duffham? I have seen him sometimes before. Stay, though, I remember—I think I have heard. He belongs to that daughter of Mr. Layne's who married the soldier of the same name. A lieutenant, or some grade of that kind."

"Lieutenant Layne then; Captain Layne now," carelessly replied Mr. Duffham. "Hopes to get his majority soon, no doubt."

"Oh, indeed. I sometimes wonder how people without family connections manage to obtain rapid promotion. The grandmother takes care of the child, I suppose. Quite a charge for her."

Mr. Duffham standing now by her side, glanced at Lady Chavasse. Her countenance was open, unembarrassed; there was no sign of ulterior thought upon it. Evidently a certain event of the past was not just then in her remembrance.

"How is the old lady?"

"Middling. She breaks fast. I doubt, though, if one of her daughters will not go before her."

Lady Chavasse turned quickly at the words.

"I speak of the one who is with her—Miss Elizabeth Layne," continued Mr. Duffham, busily rolling up the bottle. "Her health is failing; I think seriously."

There was a pause. Lady Chavasse looked hard at the white knobs on the drug draws. But that she began to speak, old Duffham might have thought she was counting how many there were of them.

"The other one—Miss Mary Layne—is she still in that situation in India? A governess, or something of the kind, we heard she went out to be."

"Governess to Captain Layne's children. Oh yes, she's there. And likely to be, the people over the way seem to say."

Captain and Mrs. Layne consider that they have a treasure in her."

"Oh, I make no doubt she would do her duty. Thank you; never mind sealing it. I will be sure to attend to your direction, Mr. Duffham."

She swept out to the carriage, which had not drawn up, and stepped over the low step into it. The Surgeon put the bottle by her side, and saluted her as she drove away. Across the road trotted the little fellow in the pinafore.

"Did oo see dat booful tarriage, Mis'er Duffham? I'd like to 'ide in it."

"You would, would you, Master Arthur," returned the surgeon, hoisting the child for a moment on his shoulder, and then sitting him on his feet again, as Miss Layne appeared at the door. "Be off back; there's Aunt Elizabeth looking angry. It's against the law, you know, sir, to run out beyond the house."

And the little lad ran over at once obediently.

Nearly three years back—not quite so much by a month or two—Church Dykely was gratified by the intelligence that Captain Layne's wife, who was then sojourning in Europe, was coming on a short visit to her mother with her three or four weeks' old baby. Church Dykely welcomed the news, for it was a sort of break to the monotonous jog-trot village life, and warmly received Mrs. Richard Layne and the child on their arrival. The infant was born in France, where Mrs. Richard Layne had been staying with one of her sisters—Mary—and whence she had now come direct to her mother's; Mary having gone on to Liverpool to join Mrs. Richard Layne's other children. The baby, made much of by the neighbors, remained with old Mrs. Layne; Mrs. Richard Layne did not deem it well to take so young a child to India, as he

seemed rather delicate. Church Dykely said how generous it was of her to sacrifice her motherly feelings for the baby's good; but the Layne's had always been unselfish. And Baby Arthur, as all the place called him, lived and thrived, and was now as fine a little fellow for his age as might be, with a generous spirit and open heart. My Lady Chavasse (having temporarily forgotten it when speaking with Mr. Duffham) had heard all about the child's parentage just as the village had—that he was the son of Captain Richard Layne and his wife Susan. Chavasse Grange generally understood the same, including Sir Geoffry. There was no intercourse whatever between the Layne family and the Grange; there had not been any since Miss Mary Layne quitted it. My Lady Chavasse was in the habit of turning away her eyes when she passed Mrs. Layne's house; and in good truth, though perhaps her conscience reminded her of it at these moments, she had three parts forgotten the unpleasant episode of the past.

And the little boy grew and thrived, and became as much a feature in Church Dykely as other features were—say the bridge over the mill-stream, or the butcher's wife—and was no more thought of than they.

Miss Elizabeth Layne caught hold of the young truant's hand with a jerk and a reprimand, telling him he'd be run over some day. She had occasion to tell it him rather often, for he was of a fearless nature.

Mr. Duffham nodded across the road to Miss Elizabeth.

"Are you better to-day?" he called out. People don't stand on much ceremony in these rural places.

"Not much, thank you," came the answer.

For Miss Elizabeth Layne had been anything but strong lately; her symptoms looking very like those that herald in consumption.

The time rolled on, bringing its changes. Elizabeth Layne died. Mrs. Layne grew very feeble, and it was thought and said by everybody that one of her daughters ought to be residing with her. There was only one left unmarried—Mary. Mary received news in India of this state of things at home, together with a summons from her mother. Not at all a peremptory summons. Mrs. Layne wrote a few shaky lines, praying her to come, "if she'd not mind returning to the place;" if she did mind it, why she, the mother, must die alone as she best could. There was a short struggle in Mary Layne's heart; a quick, sharp battle, and she gave in. Her duty to her mother lay before aught else of obligation in God's sight, and she would yield to it. As soon as preparations for her voyage could be made, she embarked for England.

It was autumn when she got home, and Church Dykely received her gladly. Mary Layne had always been a favorite in the place from the time her father, the good-hearted, hard-working surgeon, had fondly shown her, his youngest and fairest child, to the public, a baby of a few days old. But Church Dykely found her greatly changed. They remembered her as a blooming girl; she came back to them a grave woman, looking older than her years; and with a pale sweet countenance that seemed never to have a smile on it. She was but six-and-twenty yet.

Miss Layne took up her post at once by the side of her ailing mother. What with attending her and attending to Baby Arthur—whom she took into training at once just as she had the children in India—she found her time fully occupied. The

boy, when she returned, was turned five. She went out very rarely; never—except to church, or at dusk—when the family were at the Grange, for she seemed to have a dread of meeting them. Church Dykely wondered that Miss Layne did not call at the Grange, considering that she had been humble companion there before she went out, or that my lady did not come to see her; but supposed the lapse of time had caused the acquaintanceship to fall through.

Mary had brought good news from India. Her sister Eleanor, Mrs. Allan McAlpin, had a little girl, to the great delight of all concerned. Just when they had given it up as a bad job, and decided that it was of no good to hope any longer, the capricious infant arrived. Major Layne told his wife confidentially that Allan McAlpin was prouder of that baby than any dog with two tails.

And henceforth this was to be Mary Layne's home, and this her occupation—the caring for her mother, so long as the old lady should be spared, and the gentle leading to good of the child, Arthur. Mrs. Layne, lapsing into her dotage, would sit in her favorite place, the parlor window, open when the weather allowed it, watching people as they passed. Mary's smooth and bright brown hair might be seen in the background, her head drooping over the book she was reading to Mrs. Layne, or over her work when the old lady got tired of hearing, or over Master Arthur's lessons at the table. Not only lessons to fit him for this world did Mary teach him; but such as would stand him in good aid when striving on for the next. Twice a day, morning and evening, would she take the child alone, and talk to him of Heaven, and things pertaining to it. Aunt Elizabeth's lessons had been mostly on the score of behavior; the other kind

of instruction had been all routine at the best. Mary remedied this; and she had an apt little scholar. Seated on her knee, his bright blue eyes turned up to her face, the child would listen and talk, and say he would be a good boy always, always. The tears wet his eyelashes at her Bible stories; he would put his little face down on her bosom, and whisper out a sobbing wish that Jesus would love *him* as he had loved the little children on earth. There is no safeguard like this seed sown in childhood; if withheld, nothing can replace it in after life.

They grew the best and greatest friends, these two. Whether Mary loved him, or not, she did not say; she was ever patient and thoughtful with him, with a kind of grave tenderness. But the child grew to love her more than he had ever loved any one in his young life. One day, when he did something wrong, and saw how it grieved her, his repentant sobs nearly choked him. It was very certain that Mary had found the way to his heart, and might mould him for good or for ill.

The child was a chatterbox. Aunt Elizabeth used to say he ought to have the tip cut off his tongue. He seemed never tired of asking about papa and mamma in India, and Allan and Bobby and the rest, and the elephants and camels—and Dick the eldest, who was in London, at the school attached to King's College.

"When will they come over to see us, Aunt Mary?" he questioned one day, when he was on Mary's knee.

"If grandmamma's pretty well we will have Dick down at Christmas."

"Is Dick to be a soldier like papa?"

"I think so."

"I shall be a soldier, too."

There was an involuntary tightening of her hands round him, as if she would guard him from *that*.

"I hope not, Arthur. One soldier in a family's enough; and that is to be Richard."

"Is papa a very big, big brave man, with a flashing sword?"

"Major Layne is tall and very brave. He wears his sword sometimes."

"Oh, Aunt Mary, I should like to be a soldier and have a sword! When I can write well enough I'll write a letter to papa to ask him. I'd like to ride on the elephants."

"They are not as good to ride as horses."

"Is mamma as pretty as you?" demanded Master Arthur after a pause.

"Prettier. I am pale and"—sad, she was going to say, but put in another word—"quiet."

"When you go back to India, Aunt Mary, shall you take me? I should like to sail in the great ship."

"Arthur, dear, I do not think I shall go back."

And so Miss Mary Layne—she was Miss Layne now—stayed on. Church Dykely would see a slender, grave young lady, dressed generally in black silk, whose sweet face seemed to have too care-worn an expression for her years. But if her countenance was worn and weary, her heart was not. That seemed full of love and charity for all; of gentle compassion for any wrong-doer, of sympathy for the sick and suffering. She got to be revered, and valued, and respected as few had ever been in Church Dykely—certainly as none had, so young as she was. Baby Arthur, clacking his whip as he went through the street on his walks by the nurse-girl, Betsey's, side, his chattering tongue never still; now running into the blacksmith's shed to watch the sparks; now perching himself on the top of the village stocks; and now frightening Betsey out of her senses by

attempting to leap the brook—in spite of these out-door attractions, Baby Arthur was ever ready to run home to Aunt Mary, as though she were his best treasure.

When Miss Layne had been about six months at her mother's, a piece of munificent good fortune befell her, as conveyed to her in official and non-official communications from India. Andrew McAlpin—the head of the great McAlpin house in Calcutta, who had respected Mary Layne above all women, and had wished to marry her, as may be remembered—Andrew McAlpin was dead, and had left some of his accumulated wealth to Mary. It would amount to six hundred a year, and was bequeathed to her absolutely—at her own disposal to will away when she in turn should die. In addition to this, he directed that the sum of one thousand pounds should be paid to her at once. He also left a thousand pounds to Mrs. Richard Layne—but that does not concern us.

This good man's death brought great grief to Mary. It had been the result of an accident; he lay ill but a few weeks. As to the fortune—well of course that was welcome, for Mary had been casting many an uneasy thought to the future on sundry scores, and what little money she had been able to put by, out of her salary as governess at Major Layne's, was now nearly exhausted. She thought she knew why Mr. McAlpin had thus generously remembered her; and it was an additional proof of the thoughtful goodness which had ever characterized his life. Oh if she could but have thanked him! If she had but known it before he died. He had been in the habit of corresponding with her since her return to Europe, for she and he had remained firm friends, but the thought of ever benefiting by him in this way had never entered her head. As how should it?—seeing that he was a strong man, and

only in the prime of life. She mourned his loss; she thought she could best have spared any other friend; but all the regrets in the world would not bring him back to life. He was gone. And Allan McAlpin was now sole head of the wealthy house, besides inheriting a vast private fortune from his brother. Eleanor McAlpin, once Eleanor Layne, might well wish for more children amidst all her riches.

The first thing Mary Layne did with some of this thousand pounds—which had been conveyed to her simultaneously with the tidings of the death—was to convey her mother to the seaside for change, together with Baby Arthur and the nurse, Betsey. Before quitting home she held one or two interviews with James Sprigings, the house agent, builder, and decorator, and left certain orders with him. On their return, old Mrs. Layne did not know her house. It had been put into substantial and ornamental repair inside and out, and was now one of the prettiest—not to say handsomest—in the village. All the old carpets were replaced by handsome new ones, and a good portion of the shabby old furniture was removed for new.

"My dear, why have you done it?" cried Mrs. Layne, looking about her in amazement. "Is it not a waste of money?"

"I think not, mother," was the answer. "Most likely this will be my home for life. Perhaps Arthur's home after me. At least it will be his until he shall be of an age to go out in the world."

Mrs. Layne said no more. She had got of late very indifferent to outward things. Old people do get so, and Mr. Duffham said her system was breaking up. The seaside air had done her good; they had gone to it in May, and came back in August. Mary added a third servant to the house-

hold, and things went on as before in their quiet routine.

One afternoon in September, when they had been at home about a month, Mary went out, and took Arthur. She was going to see a poor cottager who had nursed herself, Mary, when she was a child, and who had recently lost her husband. When they came to the gates of Chavasse Grange, past which their road lay, Master Arthur made a dead standstill, and wholly declined to proceed. The child was in a black velvet tunic, the tips of his white drawers just discernible beneath it, and his legs bare down to the white socks. As bonny a boy for his six years as could be seen anywhere, with a noble, fearless bearing. Mary wore her usual black silk, a rich one, too, with a little crape on it—the mourning for Mr. McAlpin. Arthur was staring over the way through the open gates of the Grange.

"I want to go in and see the peacock."

"Go in and see the peacock!" exclaimed Miss Layne, rather struck aback by the demand. "What can you mean, Arthur? The peacock is up by the house."

"I know it is. We can go up there and see it, Aunt Mary."

"Indeed we cannot, Arthur; I never heard of such a thing."

"Betsey lets me go."

The confession involved all kinds of thoughts, and a flush crossed Miss Layne's delicate face. The family were not at the Grange, as she knew; they had gone up to London in January, when Parliament met, and had never returned since. But nevertheless she did not like to hear of this intrusion into the grounds of the nurse and child. The peacock had been a recent acquisition; or, as Arthur expressed it, had "just come to live there." When he had talked of it at home, Mary supposed he had seen it on the slopes in pass-

ing. These green slopes, dotted here and there with shrubs and flowers, came down to the boundary wall that skirted the highway. The avenue through the gates wound round abruptly, hiding itself beyond the lodge.

"Come, my dear; it is already late."

"But, Aunt Mary, you *must* see the peacock. He has got the most splendid tail. Sometimes he drags it behind him on the grass, and sometimes it's all spread out in a round, like that fan you brought home from India. Do come."

Miss Layne did not reply for the moment. She was inwardly debating upon what plea she could forbid the child's ever going in again to see the peacock; the interdiction would sound most arbitrary if she gave none. All at once, as if by magic, the peacock appeared in view, strutting down the slopes, its proud tail, in all its glory, spread aloft in the rays of the declining sun.

It was too much for Arthur. With a shout of delight he leaped off the low foot-path, flew across the road and in at the gates. In vain Mary called; in his glad excitement he did not so much as hear.

There ensued a noise as of the fleet foot of a horse, and then a crash, a man's shout, and a child's cry. What harm had been done? In dire fear, Mary Lane ran to see, her legs trembling under her.

Just at the sharp turn beyond the lodge a group stood—Sir Geoffrey Chavasse had Arthur in his arms—his horse, from which he had flung himself, being held and soothed by a mounted groom. The lodge children also had come running out to look. She understood it in a moment: Sir Geoffrey must have been riding quickly down from the house, his groom behind him, when the unfortunate little intruder encountered him just at the turn, and there was no possibility of pulling up in time.

In fact, the boy had run absolutely on to the horse's legs.

She stood, white and faint, and sick, against the wall of the lodge, not daring to look into the accident—for Mary Layne was but a true woman, timid and sensitive; as little daring to encounter Sir Geoffry Chavasse, whom she had not been close to but for a few months short of seven years. That it should have occurred!—that this untoward thing should have occurred!

"I wonder whose child it is?" she heard Sir Geoffry say—and the well-remembered tones came home to her with a heart-thrill. "Poor little fellow! could it have been my fault, or his? Dovy"—to the groom—"ride on at once and get Mr. Duffham here. Never mind my horse—he's all right now. You can lead him up to the house, Bill."

The groom touched his hat, and then his horse, and rode past Mary on his errand. Sir Geoffry was already carrying the child to the Grange. Bill, the eldest of the lodge fry, following with the horse. A wailing cry burst from Arthur.

"Aunt Mary! Aunt Mary!—Oh, let her come! I want Aunt Mary."

And then it struck Sir Geoffry Chavasse that a gentleman's child, such as this one by his appearance evidently was, would not have been out without an attendant. He turned round and saw a lady in black standing by the lodge.

The wailing cry set in again. "Aunt Mary! I want Aunt Mary."

There was no help for it. She came on with her agitated face, from which every drop of blood had faded. Sir Geoffry, occupied with the child, did not notice her much.

"I am so grieved," he began; "I trust the injury will be found not to be very serious. My horse——"

He had lifted his eyes then, and knew her instantly. His own face turned crimson; the words he had been about to say died unspoken on his lips. For a moment they looked in each other's faces, and might have seen, had the time been one of less agitation, how sorrowful care had left its traces there. The next, they remembered the present time, and what was due from them.

"I beg your pardon: Miss Layne, I think?" said Sir Geoffry, contriving to release one hand and raise his hat.

"Yes, sir," she answered, and bowed in return.

He sat down on the bank for a moment to get a better hold of the child. Blood was dripping from one of the little velvet sleeves. Sir Geoffry, carrying him as gently as was possible, made all haste to the house. The window of what had been the garden-parlor stood open, and he took him into it at once. Ah, how they both remembered it! It had been refurnished and made grand now; but the room was the room still. Sir Geoffry had returned home that morning; his wife and Lady Chavasse were not expected for a day or two. Scarcely any servants were as yet in the house; but the woman who had been left in charge, Hester Picker, came in with warm water. She curtsied to Miss Layne.

"Dear little fellow!" she exclaimed, her tongue ready as of old. "How did it happen, sir?"

"My horse knocked him down," replied Sir Geoffry. "Get me some linen, Picker."

The boy lay on the sofa where he had been put, his hat off, and his pretty light brown hair falling from his face, pale now. Apparently there was no injury save to the arm. Sir Geoffry looked at Mary.

"I am a bit of a surgeon," he said. "Will you allow me to examine his hurt

as a surgeon would? Duffham cannot be here just yet."

"Oh yes, certainly," she answered.

"I must cut his velvet sleeve up."

And she bowed in acquiescence to that.

Hester Picker came in with the linen.

Before commencing to cut the sleeve, Sir Geoffry touched the arm here and there, as if testing where the damage might lie. Arthur cried out.

"That hurts you," said Sir Geoffry.

"Not much," answered the little fellow, trying to be brave. "Papa's a soldier, and I want to be a soldier, so I won't mind a little hurt."

"Your papa's a soldier? Ah, yes, I think I remember," said Sir Geoffry, turning to Mary. "It is the little son of Captain Layne."

"My papa is Major Layne now," spoke up Arthur before she could make any answer. "He and mamma live in India."

"And so you want to be a soldier the same as papa?" said Sir Geoffry, testing the basin of water with his finger, which Picker was holding, and which had been brought in full hot.

"Yes I do. Aunt Mary there says No, and grandmamma says No: but—oh what's that?"

He had caught sight of the blood for the first time and broke off with a shuddering cry. Sir Geoffry was ready now, and had the scissors in his hand. But before using them he spoke to Miss Layne.

"Will you sit here while I look at it?" he asked, putting a chair with its face to the open window and its back to the sofa. And she understood the motive, and thanked him; and said she would walk about outside.

By-and-by, when she was tired of waiting, and all seemed very quiet, she looked in. Arthur had fainted. Sir Geoffry was

bathing his forehead with eau de Cologne; Picker had run for something in a tumbler, and wine stood on the table.

"Was it the pain?—did it hurt him very badly?" asked Mary, supposing that the arm had been bathed and perhaps dressed.

"I have not done anything to it; I preferred to leave it for Duffham," said Sir Geoffry—and at the same moment she caught sight of the velvet sleeve laid open, and something lying on it that looked like a mass of linen. Mary turned even whiter than the child.

"Do not be alarmed," said Sir Geoffry. "Your little nephew is only faint from the loss of blood. Drink this," he added, bringing her a glass of wine.

But she would not take it. As Sir Geoffry was putting it on the table, Arthur began to revive. Young children are elastic; ill one minute, well the next; and he began to talk again.

"Aunt Mary, are you there?"

She moved to the sofa and took his uninjured hand.

"We must not tell grandmamma, Aunt Mary. It would frighten her."

"Bless his dear little thoughtful heart!" interjected Hester Picker. "Here comes something."

The something proved to be a fly, and it brought Mr. Duffham. Before the groom had reached the village, he overtook this said fly and the surgeon in it, who was then returning home from another accident. Turning round at the groom's news—"Some little child had run against Sir Geoffry's horse, and was hurt"—he came up to the Grange.

When Mr. Duffham saw that it was *this* child, he felt curiously taken to. Up the room and down the room, looked he; then at Sir Geoffry, then at Miss Layne, then at Hester Picker, saying nothing. Last



of all he walked up to the sofa and gazed at the white face lying there.

"Well," said he, "and what is this? And how did it happen?"

"It was the peacock," answered Arthur. "I ran away from Aunt Mary to look at it, and the horse came."

"The dear innocent!" cried Hester Picker. "No wonder he ran. It's a love of a peacock."

"Don't you think it was very naughty, young sir, to run from your aunt?" returned Mr. Duffham.

"Yes, very. Because she had told me not to. Aunt Mary, I'll never do it again."

The two gentlemen and Hester Picker remained in the room, Mary again left it. The arm was crushed, rather badly; and Mr. Duffham knew it would require care and skill to cure it.

"You must send to Worcester for its best surgeon to help you," said the baronet, when the dressing was over. "I feel that I am responsible to Major Layne."

Old Duffham drew his eyes together as he glanced at the speaker. "I don't think it's necessary," he said; "no surgeon can do more than I can. However, it may be satisfactory to Major Layne that we should be on the safe side, so I'll send."

When the child was ready, Mary got into the fly, which had waited, and Mr. Duffham put him to lie on her lap.

"I hope, Miss Layne, I may be allowed to call to-morrow and see how he gets on," said Sir Geoffry at the same time. And she did not feel that it was possible for her to say No. Mr. Duffham got up beside the driver; to get a sniff he said of the evening air.

"How he is changed! He has suffered as I have," murmured Mary Layne to herself, as her tears fell on Baby Ar-

thur, asleep now. "I am very thankful that he has no suspicion."

The child had said Don't tell grand-mamma; but to keep it from Mrs. Layne was simply impracticable. With the first stopping of the fly at the door, out came the old lady; she had been marveling what had become of them and was wanting her tea. Mr. Duffham took her in again, and said a few words, making light of it, before he lifted out Baby Arthur.

A skillful surgeon was at the house the next day, in conjunction with Mr. Duffham. The arm and its full use would be saved, he said; its cure effected; but the child and those about him must have patience, for it might be rather long about. Arthur said he should like to write to his papa in India and tell him that it was his own fault for running away from Aunt Mary; he could write letters in big text hand. The surgeon smiled, and told him he must wait to write until he could use both arms again.

They had not left the house many minutes when Sir Geoffry Chavasse called, having walked over from the Grange. Miss Layne quitted the room when she heard who it was, leaving her mother to receive him. The old lady, her perceptions a little dulled with time and age, and perhaps also her memory, felt somewhat impressed and fluttered at the visit. To her it almost seemed the honor that it used to be; that one painful episode of the past seemed to be as much forgotten at the moment as though it had never had place.

Arthur was lying close before the window, in the good light of the fine morning. It was the first clear view Sir Geoffry had obtained of him. The garden parlor at the Grange faced the east, so that the room on the previous evening, being turned from the setting sun, had been but

shady at the best, and the sofa was at the far end of it. As Sir Geoffry gazed at the child now, the face struck him as being like somebody's; he could not tell whose. The blue eyes especially, turned up in all their eager brightness to his, seemed quite familiar.

"He says I must not write to papa until I get well," said Arthur, who had begun to look on Sir Geoffry as an old acquaintance.

"Who does?" asked the baronet.

"The gentleman who came with Mr. Duffham."

"It is the doctor from Worcester, Sir Geoffry," put in old Mrs. Layne. She was sitting in her easy chair near: her spectacles keeping the place between the leaves of the closed Bible on her lap; her withered hands in their black lace mittens and frilled white ruffles, crossed upon the Book. Every now and then she nodded with incipient sleep.

"I am so very sorry this should have happened," sir Geoffry said, turning to Mrs. Layne. "The little fellow was running up to get a look at the peacock, it seems; and I was riding rather fast. I shall never ride fast round that corner again."

"But Sir Geoffry, they tell me that the child ran right against you at the corner; that it was no fault of yours at all, sir."

"It was my fault, grandmamma," said Arthur. "And, Sir Geoffry, that's why I wanted to write to papa; I want to tell him so."

"I think I had better write for you," said Sir Geoffry, looking down at the boy with a smile.

"Will you? Shall you tell him it was my fault?"

"No. I shall tell him it was mine."

"But it was not yours. You must not write what's not true. If Aunt Mary

thought I could tell a story, or write one, oh I don't know what she'd do. God hears all we say, you know, sir."

Sir Geoffry smiled—a sad smile—at the earnest words, at the eager look in the bright eyes. Involuntarily the wish came into his mind that *he* had a brave, fearless-hearted, right-principled son; such as this boy was.

"Then I think I had better describe how it happened, and let Major Layne judge for himself whether it was my fast riding or your fast running that caused the mischief."

"You'll tell about the peacock? it had its tail out."

"Of course I'll tell about the peacock. I shall say to Major Layne that his little boy—I don't think I have heard your name," broke off Sir Geoffry. "What is it?"

"It's Arthur. Papa's is Richard. My big brother's is Richard, too: he is at King's College. Which name do you like best, sir?"

"I think I like Arthur. It is my own name also."

"Yours is Sir Geoffry."

"And Arthur as well."

But at this juncture old Mrs. Layne, having started up from a nod, interposed to put a summary stop to the chatter, telling Arthur in a cross tone that Mr. Duffham and the other doctor had forbid him to talk much. And then she begged pardon of Sir Geoffry for saying it, but thought the doctors wished the child to be kept quiet and cool. Sir Geoffry took the opportunity to say adieu to the little patient.

"May I come to see the peacock when I get well, Sir Geoffry?"

"Certainly. You shall come and look at him for a whole day if grandmamma will allow it."

Grandmamma gave no motion or word of assent, but Arthur took it for granted. "Betsey can bring me if Aunt Mary won't; she's my nurse, sir. I wish I could have him before that window to look at while I lie here to get well. I like peacocks and musical boxes better than anything in the world."

"Musical boxes!" exclaimed Sir Geoffrey. "Do you care for them?"

"Oh yes, they are beautiful. Do you know the little lame boy who can't walk, down Piefinch cut? His father comes to do grandmamma's garden. Do you know him, Sir Geoffrey? His name's Reuben."

"It's Noah the gardener's son, sir," put in Mrs. Layne aside to Sir Geoffrey. "He was thrown down stairs when a baby, and has been a cripple ever since."

But the eager, intelligent eyes were still cast up, waiting for the answer. Where *have* I seen them? mentally debated Sir Geoffrey, alluding to the eyes.

"I know the name," he answered.

"Well, Reuben has got a musical box, and it plays three tunes. He's older than I am. He's ten. One of them's the 'Blue Bells of Scotland.'"

Sir Geoffrey nodded and got away. He went straight over to Mr. Duffham's, and found him writing a letter in his surgery.

"I hope the child will do well," said the baronet, when he had shaken hands. "I have just been to see him. What an intelligent, nice little fellow it is."

"Oh he will be all right again in time, Sir Geoffrey," was the doctor's reply, as he began to fold his letter.

"He is a pretty boy, too, very. His eyes are strangely like some one's I have seen, but for the life of me I cannot tell whose."

"*Really!*—do you mean it?" cried Mr. Duffham speaking, as it seemed, in some surprise.

"Mean what?"

"That you cannot tell."

"Indeed I can't. They puzzled me all the while I was there. Do you know? Say, if you do."

"They are like your own, Sir Geoffrey."

"Like my own?"

"They are your own eyes over again. And yours—as poor Layne used to say; and as the picture in the Grange dining-room shows us also, for the matter of that—are Sir Peter's, Sir Peter's, your's, and the child's; they are all the same."

For a long space of time, as it seemed, the two gentlemen gazed at each other. Mr. Duffham with a questioning and still surprised look: Sir Geoffrey in a kind of bewildered amazement.

"Duffham!—you—you—Surely it is not *that* child!"

"Yes, it is."

He backed to a chair and stumbled into it rather than sat; somewhat in the same manner that Mrs. Layne had backed against the counter nearly seven years before, and upset the scales. The old lady seemed to have aged, since, quicker than she ought to have done; but her face then had not been whiter than was Geoffrey Chavassee's now.

"Good heavens!"

The dead silence was only broken by these murmured words that fell from his lips. Mr. Duffham finished folding his note, and directed it.

"Sir Geoffrey, I beg your pardon! I beg it a thousand times. If I had had the smallest notion that you were ignorant of this, I should never have spoken."

Sir Geoffrey took out his handkerchief and wiped his brow. Some moisture had gathered there.

"How was I to suspect it?" he asked.

"I never supposed but that you *must* have known it all along."

"All along from when, Duffham?"

"From—from—well, from the time you first knew that a child was over there."

Sir Geoffry cast his thoughts back. He could not remember anything about the child's coming to Church Dykely. In point of fact, the Grange had been empty at the time.

"I understood that the child was one of Captain and Mrs. Layne's," he rejoined. "Everybody said it; and I never had any other thought. Even yesterday at the Grange you spoke of him as such, Duffham!"

"Of course. Miss Layne was present—and Hester Picker—and the child himself. I did not speak to deceive you, Sir Geoffry. When you said what you did to me in coming away, about calling in other advice for the satisfaction of Major Layne, I thought you were but keeping up appearances."

"And it is so, then!"

"Oh, dear, yes."

Another pause. Mr. Duffham affixed the stamp to his letter, and put the paper straight in his note-case. Sir Geoffry suddenly lifted his hand, like one whom some disagreeable reflection overwhelms.

"To think that I was about to write to Major Layne! To think that I should have stood there, in the old lady's presence, talking boldly with the child! She must assume that my impudence is unblushing."

"Mrs. Layne is past that, Sir Geoffry. Her faculties are dulled; three parts dead. *That* need not trouble you."

The baronet put aside his handkerchief and took his hat to leave. He began stroking its nap with his coat sleeve.

"Does my mother know of this, do you think?"

"I am sure she neither knows it nor

suspects it. No one does, Sir Geoffry; the secret has been entirely kept."

"The cost of this illness must be mine, you know, Duffham."

"I think not, Sir Geoffry," was the surgeon's answer. "It would not do, I fear. There's no need, besides: Miss Layne is rich now."

"Rich! How is she rich?"

And Mr. Duffham had to explain. A wealthy gentleman in India, some connection of the Laynes, had died and left money to Mary Layne. Six or seven hundred a year; and plenty of ready means. Sir Geoffry Chavasse went out, pondering upon the world's changes.

He did not call to see the invalid again; but he bought a beautiful musical box at Worcester, and sent it in to the child by Duffham. It played six tunes. The boy had never in his life been so delighted. He returned his love and thanks to Sir Geoffry, and appended several inquiries touching the welfare of the peacock.

The first news heard by Lady Chavasse and Lady Rachel on their coming home, was of the accident caused to Major Layne's little son by Sir Geoffry's horse. Hester Picker and the other servants were full of it. It happened to be the day that Sir Geoffry had gone to Worcester after the box, so he could not join in the narrative. A sweet, beautiful boy, said Hester to my ladies, and had told them that he meant to be a soldier when he grew up, as brave as his papa. Lady Chavasse, having digested the news, and taken inward counsel with herself, decided to go and see him; it would be right and neighborly, she thought. It might be that she was wishing to bestow some slight mark of her favor upon the old lady before death should claim her; and she deemed that the honor of a call would effect this. In her heart she acknowledged

that the Laynes had behaved admirably well in regard to the past, never to have troubled her or her son by word or deed or letter; and in her heart she felt grateful for it. Some people might have acted so differently.

"I think I will go and see him, too," said Lady Rachel.

"No, pray don't," dissented Lady Chavasse hastily. "You already feel the fatigue of your journey, Rachel, do not attempt to increase it."

And as Lady Rachel really was fatigued, and did not care much about it, one way or the other, she remained at home.

It was one of Mrs. Layne's worst days—one of those when she seemed three parts childish—when Lady Chavasse was shown into the drawing-room. Mary was there. As she turned to receive her visitor, and heard the maid's announcement, "Lady Chavasse," a great astonishment inwardly stirred her, but her manner remained quiet and self-possessed. Just a minute's gaze at each other. Lady Chavasse was the same good-looking woman as of yore; not changed, not aged by so much as a day. Mary *was* changed; the shy inexperienced girl had grown into the woman who had known sorrow; who had got its marks impressed on her face. She had been pretty once, she was gravely beautiful now. Perhaps Lady Chavasse had not bargained for seeing *her*; Mary had certainly never thought thus to meet Lady Chavasse; but here they were, face to face, and must make the best of it. As they did; and with easy courtesy, both being gentlewomen. Lady Chavasse held out her hand, and Mary put hers into it.

After shaking hands with Mrs. Layne, who was too drowsy properly to respond, and shut her eyes again, my lady spoke a few pleasant words, of regret for the accident, of her wish to see the little patient, of her

hope that Major and Mrs. Layne might not be allowed to think any care on Sir Geoffry's part could have averted it. Mary went up stairs with her. Lady Chavasse could but be struck with the improved appearance of the house, quite suited now to be the abode of gentle-people; and with its apparently well-appointed, if small, household.

The child lay asleep; his nurse, Betsey, sat sewing by his side. The girl confessed that she had allowed him sometimes to run in and take a look at the peacock. Lady Chavasse would not have him awakened; she bent and kissed his cheek lightly, and talked to Mary in a whisper. It was just as though there had been no break in their acquaintanceship; just as though no painful episode, in which they were antagonistic actors, had ever occurred between them.

"I hear you have come into a fortune, Miss Layne," she said, as she shook hands with Mary again in the little hall before departure. For Hester Picker had told of this.

"Into a great deal of money," replied Mary.

"I am glad to hear it; *glad*," came the parting response, whispered emphatically in Mary's ear, and it was accompanied by a pressure of the fingers.

Mr. Duffham was standing at his door, watching my lady's exit from Mrs. Layne's house, his eyes lost in wonder. Seeing him, she crossed over and went in, Mr. Duffham throwing open the door of his sitting-room. She began speaking of the accident to Major Layne's little son; what a doleful pity it was, but that she hoped he would do well. Old Duffham replied that he hoped so, too, and thought he would.

"Mrs. Layne seems to be getting very old," went on Lady Chavasse. "She was

as drowsy as she could be this afternoon ; she seemed scarcely to know me."

"Old people are apt to be sleepy after their dinner," returned the doctor.

And then there was a pause. Lady Chavasse (as Duffham's diary expresses it) seemed to be absent in manner that day, as if she were thinking to herself instead of him. Because he had nothing else to say, he asked after the health of Lady Rachel. That aroused her at once.

"She is not strong. She is not strong. I am sure of it."

"She does not seem to ail much, that I can see," returned Duffham, who often had to hear this same thing said of Lady Rachel. "She never requires medical advice."

"I don't care ; she is not strong. There are no children," continued Lady Chavasse, dropping her voice to a whisper, and a kind of piteous, imploring expression darkened her eyes.

"No."

"Four years married, going on for five, and no signs of any. No signs of children, Mr. Duffham."

"I can't help it, my lady," returned Duffham.

"Nobody can help it. But it is an awful misfortune. It is beginning to be a great trouble in my life. As the weeks and months, and years pass on—the *years*, Mr. Duffham—and bring no hope, my very spirit seems to fail. 'Hope deferred maketh the heart sick.'"

"True."

"It has been the one great desire of my later years," continued Lady Chavasse, too much in earnest to be reticent, "and it does not come. I wonder which is the worst to be borne ; some weighty misfortune that falls and crushes, or a longed-for boon that we watch and pray for in vain ? The want of it, the eager daily strain of disappointment, has become to me worse than a nightmare."

Little Arthur Layne, attended by Betsey, spent a day at the Grange, on his recovery, invited to meet the peacock. The ladies were very kind to him ; they could but admire his gentle manners, his fearless bearing. Sir Geoffry played a game at ninepins with him on the lawn—which set of ninepins had been his own when a child, and had been lying by ever since. Betsey was told she might carry them home for Master Layne ; Sir Geoffry gave them to him.

After that the intercourse dropped again, and they became strangers as before. Except that Lady Chavasse would bow from her carriage if she saw Mrs. or Miss Layne, and Sir Geoffry raised his hat. The little boy got more notice ; when they met him out, and were walking themselves, they would, one and all, stay and speak to him.

So this episode of the accident seemed to fade into the past, as other things had faded ; and the time went on.

## CHAPTER VI.

AUTUMN leaves were strewing the ground, autumn skies were overhead. A ray of the sun came slantwise into the library, passing right across the face of Sir Geoffry Chavasse. The face had an older expression on it than his thirty years would justify. It looked worn and weary: and the bright hair, with its golden tinge, was less carefully arranged than it used to be, as if exertion were getting to be a burden, or that vanity no longer troubled him; and his frame was almost painfully thin; and a low hacking cough took him at intervals. It might have been thought that Sir Geoffry was a little out of health, and wanted a change. Lady Chavasse, his mother, had begun to admit a long-repressed doubt whether any change would benefit him.

A common desk of stained walnut-wood was open on the table before him: he had been reading over and putting straight some papers it contained—notes and diaries, and such like. Two or three of these he tore across and threw into the fire. Out of a bit of tissue paper, he took a curl of bright brown hair, recalling the day and hour when he had surreptitiously cut it off, and refused to give it up again to its blushing owner. Recalling also the happy feelings of that time—surreptitiously still, as might be said, for what business had he with them now? Holding the hair to his lips for a brief interval, he folded it up again, and took out another bit of paper. This contained a lady's ring of chased gold set with a beautiful and costly emerald. In those by-gone years he had bought the ring, thinking to give it in payment of the stolen hair; but the young lady in her shyness had refused so valuable a present.

Sir Geoffry held the ring so that brightness glittered in the sun, and wrapped it up again. Next he unfolded a diary, kept at that past period, and short while afterward: then it was abruptly broken off, and had never been written in. He smiled to himself he read a page here and there—but his smile was full of sadness.

Lady Chavasse came into the library rather abruptly; Sir Geoffry shut his diary and prepared to shut and lock his desk. There was a disturbed and restless and anxious look on my lady's face, but she was a far more anxious and bitter than ever making havoc with her heart.

"Why, Geoffry! have you got out of your old desk?"

Sir Geoffry smiled as he carried it to its obscure place in a dark corner of the library. When he was about twelve years old, and they were passing through London, he went to the Lowther Arcade and bought this desk, for which he had been saving up his shillings.

"I don't believe any lad ever valued a prize as I thought I had when I chased in that desk, mother," was his laughing remark.

"I dare say it has a vast deal of rubbish in it," said Lady Chavasse, smilingly.

"Not much else—for all the good it can ever be. I was but glancing over it, mother—rubbish—foolish mementoes of my school days. These days are weary; and I don't know how to make their hours fly."

Lady Chavasse sighed at the word. She used to go shooting in the autumn and hunting once in a while, in the season: he had not strength for sports now.

Opening the desk he commonly used, a very handsome one that had been Lady Chavasse's present to him, he took a small book from it and put it into his breast pocket. Lady Chavasse, watching all his movements, as she had grown accustomed to do, saw and knew what the book was—a Bible. Perhaps nothing had struck so much on the lady's fears as the habit he had fallen into of reading often the Bible. She had come upon him doing it in all kinds of odd places. Out amidst the rocks at the seaside where they had recently been staying—and should have stayed longer but that he got tired and wanted to come home; out in the seats of this garden, amidst the roses—or rather where the roses had been; in the library; in his dressing-room—Lady Chavasse would see him with this small Bible. He always slipped it away when she or any one else approached: but the habit was casting on her spirit a very ominous shadow. It seemed to show her that he knew he must be drawing near to the world that the Bible tells of, and was making ready for his journey. How her heart ached, ached always, Lady Chavasse would not have liked to avow.

"Where's Rachel?" he asked.

"On the sofa, up stairs."

Sir Geoffrey stirred the fire mechanically, his thoughts elsewhere—just as he had stirred it in a memorable interview of the days gone by. Unconsciously they had taken up the same position as on that unhappy morning; he with his elbow on the mantle-piece, and his face partly turned from his mother; she in the same chair, and on the same red square of the Turkey carpet. The future had been before them then: it lay in their own hands, so to say, to choose the path for good or for ill. Sir Geoffrey had pointed out which was the right one to take, and that it would bring

them happiness. But my lady had negatived it, and he could only bow to her decree. And so, the turning tide was passed, not seized upon, and they had been sailing since on a sea tolerably smooth, but without depth in it. What had the voyage brought forth? Not much. And it seemed, so far as one was concerned, nearly at an end now.

"I fancy Rachel cannot be well, mother," observed Sir Geoffrey. "She would not lie down so much if she were."

"A little inertness, Geoffrey; nothing more. About Christmas?" continued Lady Chavasse. "Shall you be well enough to go to the Derristons', do you think?"

"I think we had better let Christmas draw nearer before laying out any plans for it," he answered.

"Yes, that's all very well: but I am going to write to Lady Derriston to-day, and she'll expect me to mention it. Shall you like to go?"

A moment's pause, and then he turned to her: his clear blue eyes, ever kind and gentle, looking straight into hers; his voice low and tender.

"I do not suppose I shall ever go away from the Grange again."

She turned quite white. Was it coming so near as that? A kind of terror took possession of her.

"Geoffrey! *Geoffrey!*"

"My darling mother, I will stay with you if I can; you know that. But the fiat does not lie with you or with me."

Sir Geoffrey went behind her chair, and put his arms round her playfully, kissing her with a strange tenderness of heart that he sought to hide.

"It may be all well yet mother. Don't let it trouble you before the time."

In the after part of the day the surgeon, Duffham, bustled in. His visit was later than usual.



"And how are you, Sir Geoffrey?" he asked, as they sat alone, facing each other between the table and the fire.

"Much the same, Duffham."

"Look here, Sir Geoffrey—you should rally both yourself and your spirits. It's of no use *giving way* to illness. There's a certain listlessness upon you; I've seen it for some time. Shake it off."

"Willingly—if you will give me the power," was Sir Geoffrey's reply. "The listlessness you speak of proceeds from the fact that my health and energies fail me. As to my spirits, there's nothing the matter with them."

Mr. Duffham turned over with his fingers a glass paper-weight that happened to lie on the table, as if he wanted to see the fishing-boats on the sea that its landscape represented, and then he glanced at Sir Geoffrey.

"Of course you wish to get well?"—with a slight emphasis on the "wish."

"Most certainly I wish to get well. For my mother's sake—and of course also for my wife's—as well as for my own. I don't expect to, though, Duffham."

"Well, that's saying a great deal," retorted Duffham, pretending to make a mock of it.

"I've not been strong for some time—as you may have seen, perhaps: but since the beginning of May, when the intensely hot weather came in, I have felt as—as—"

"As what, Sir Geoffrey?"

"As though I should never live to see another May, hot or cold."

"Unseasonable heat has that effect on some people, Sir Geoffrey. Tries their nerves."

"I am not aware that it tries mine. My nerves are as sound as need be. The insurance offices won't take my life at any price, Duffham," he resumed.

"Have you tried them?"

"Two of the best in London. When I began to grow somewhat doubtful about myself in the spring, I thought of the future of those near and dear to me, and would have insured my life for their benefit. The doctors refused to certify. Since then I have felt nearly sure in my own mind that what must be will be. And, day by day, I have watched the shadow drawing nearer."

The doctor leaned forward and spoke a few earnest words of encouragement, before departing. Sir Geoffrey was only too willing to receive them—in spite of the inward conviction that lay upon him.

Lady Rachel Chavasse entered the library in the course of the afternoon. She wore a sweeping silk, the color of lilac, and gold ornaments. Her face had not changed: with its classically-carved contour and its pale coldness.

"Does Duffham think you are better, Geoffrey?"

"Not much, I fancy."

"Suppose we were to try another change—Germany, or somewhere?"

"I would rather be here than anywhere, Rachel."

"I should like you to get well, you know, Geoffrey."

"I should like it too, my dear."

"Mamma has written for us to go into Somersetshire for Christmas," continued Lady Rachel, putting her foot, encased in its black satin shoe and white silk stocking, on the fender.

"Ay. My mother was talking about it just now. Well, we shall see between now and Christmas, Rachel. Perhaps they can come to us instead."

Lady Rachel turned her very light eyes upon her husband: eyes in which there sat often a peevish expression. It was not discernible at the present moment: they were coldly calm.

"Don't you think you shall be well by Christmas?"

"I cannot speak with any certainty, Rachel."

She stood a minute or two longer, and then walked round the room before the shelves, in search of some entertaining book. It was quite evident that the state of her husband did not bring real trouble to her heart. Was the heart, too, naturally cold?—or was it that as yet no suspicion of the seriousness of the case had penetrated to her? Something of both, perhaps.

Selecting a book, she was leaving the library with it when Sir Geoffrey asked if she would not rather stay by the fire to read. But she said she preferred to go to her sofa.

"Are you well, Rachel?" he asked.

"My back feels tired always. I suppose we are something alike, Geoffrey—not over strong," she concluded with a smile.

That night Duffham made the annexed entry in his Journal.

He knows the critical state he is in. Has known it, it seems, for some time. I suspected he did. Sir Geoffrey's one that you may read as a book in his open candor. He would "get well if he could," he says, for his mother's sake. As of course he would, were the result under his own control: a fine young fellow of the upper ten, with every substantial good to make life pleasant, and no evil habits or thoughts to draw him back, would not close his eyes on this world without a pang, and a struggle to remain awhile longer in it.

I cannot do more for him than I am doing. All the faculty combined could not. Neither do I say, as he does, that he will not get better: on the contrary, I think there's just a chance that he *will*:

and I honestly told him so. It's just a toss-up. He was always delicate until he grew to manhood: then he seemed to be thoroughly healthy and strong. Query: would this delicacy have come back again had his life been made as happy as it might have been? My lady can debate that point with herself in after years: it may be that she'll have plenty of time to do it in. Sir Geoffrey's is one of those sensitive natures where the mind seems almost wholly to influence the body; and that past trouble was a sharp blow to him. Upright and honorable, he could not well bear the remorse that fell upon him—it has been keenly felt, I verily believe, until this hour: another's life was blighted that his might be aggrandized. *My own opinion is, that had he been allowed to do as he wished, and make reparation, thereby securing his own happiness, he might have flung off the tendency to delicacy still, and lived to be as old as his father, Sir Peter.* Should my lady ever speak to me upon the subject, I shall tell her this. Geoffrey Chavasse has lived with a weight upon him. It was not so much that his own hopes were gone, and his love-dream wrecked, as that he had brought far worse than this upon another. Yes: my lady may thank herself that his life seems to have been wasted. Had there been children, he might in a degree have forgotten what went before, and the mind would no longer have preyed upon the body. Has the finger of heaven been in this? My pen ought to have written "*especially* in this:" for that Finger is in everything.

I hope he will get better. Yes, I *do*, in spite of a nasty doubt that crops up in my mind as I say it. I love him as I did in the old days, and respect him more. Qui vivra verra—to borrow a French phrase from young Master Arthur over the way. And now I put up my diary for the night.

## CHAPTER VII.

MRS. LAYNE was dead. Mary lived alone in her house now, with her servants and Arthur.

Never a woman so respected as she; never a lady, high or low, so revered and looked up to as Mary Layne. All the village would fly to her on any emergency: and she had counsel and help to give. The poor idolized her. A noble, tender, good gentlewoman, with the characteristic humility in her bearing that had been observable of late years, and the gentle gravity on her thoughtful face. My lady, with all her rank and her show and her condescension, had never been half so much respected as this. The little boy—in knickerbockers now, and rising nine—was a great favorite: he also got some honor through Colonel Layne. There had been a time of trouble in India, and Major Layne had distinguished himself and gained honor and promotion. The public papers proclaimed his bravery and renown; and Arthur got his share of reflected glory. As the boy passed on his pony, the blacksmith would shoot out from his forge to look after him, and say to the stranger whose horse had cast a shoe, "There goes the little son of the brave Colonel Layne: may be ye've heerd of his deeds over in Ingee." Perhaps the blacksmith considered he had acquired a kind of right in Arthur, since the pony—a sure-footed Welsh animal—was kept in the stable that belonged to his forge, and was groomed by himself or son. Miss Layne paid him for it; but, as the blacksmith said, it went again the grain: he'd ha' been proud to do aught for her and the little gentleman wi'out money.

And somehow, what with one thing and another, my lady grew to think that if

anything removed her from Chavasse Grange, Mary would take her place as best and chiefest in Church Dykely, and she would not be missed. But it was odd the thought should dawn upon her. Previsions of coming events steal into the minds of a great many of us: we know not whence they arise, and at first look on them but as idle thoughts, never recognizing them for what they are—advance shadows of the things to be.

One sunshiny afternoon close upon winter, Arthur and Mr. Duffham went out riding. Mary watched them start: the doctor on his old gray horse (that had been her father's) and Arthur on his well-groomed pony. The lad sat well: as brave-looking a little gentleman, with his upright carriage, open face, and nice attire—for Mary was particular there—as had ever gratified a fond aunt's eye or a blacksmith's heart.

Close by the gates of Chavasse Grange, they met Sir Geoffrey and his mother strolling forth. Mr. Duffham's hopes had not been fulfilled. Outwardly there was not much change in the baronet, certainly none for the better: inwardly there was a great deal. He *knew* now how very certain his fate was, and that it might not be delayed for any great length of time: a few weeks, a few months: as God should will.

"Lady Rachel is not well," observed Sir Geoffrey to the surgeon. "You must see her, Duffham. I suppose you can't come in now?"

"Yes I can; I'm in no hurry," was the doctor's answer.

"May I come, too, and see the peacock, Sir Geoffrey? I'll wait here, though, if Mr. Duffham thinks I ought."

Of course the boy was told that the

peacock would take it as a slight if he did not pay him a visit, and they all turned up the avenue. Arthur got off his pony and led it, and talked with Lady Chavasse."

"Why did you get off yet?" asked Sir Geoffry, turning to him.

"Lady Chavasse is walking," answered the boy simply.

It spoke volumes for his innate sense of politeness. Sir Geoffry remembered that *he* had possessed the same when a child.

"Have you heard what papa has done?" asked Arthur, putting the question generally. "It has been in all the newspapers, and he is full colonel now. Did you read it, Sir Geoffry?"

"Yes, I read it, Arthur."

"And the Queen's going to thank papa when he comes to England. Everybody says so. Dobbs thinks papa will be made general before he dies."

Dobbs was the blacksmith. They smiled at this. Not at the possibility for Colonel Layne, but at Dobbs.

"And with it all, Aunt Mary does not want me to be a soldier!" went on the boy in rather an aggrieved tone. "Richard's enough, she says. Dick gets on so well at King's College: he is to go to Woolwich next. I don't see the peacock!"

They had neared the house, but the gay-plumaged bird, for which Arthur retained his full admiration, was nowhere in sight. Servants came forward and led the horses away.

Arthur was taken into the garden parlour by Sir Geoffry.

"And so you would like to be a soldier?" he said, holding the boy before him, and looking down at his bright happy face.

"Oh I should: very much. If papa says I am not to be—or mamma—or Aunt

Mary—if they should tell me No, no, you *shall not*, why it would be at an end, and I'd try and like something else."

"Listen, Arthur," said Sir Geoffry, in a low earnest tone. "What you are to be, and what you are not to be, lie alike in the will of God. He will direct you aright, no doubt, when the time of choice shall come——"

"And that's what Aunt Mary says," interrupted the lad. "She says——there's the peacock!"

He had come round the corner, his tail trailing; the poor peahen, as usual, following humbly behind him. Arthur went outside the window. The peacock had a most unsocial habit of stalking away with a harsh scream if approached: Arthur knew this, and stayed where he was, talking still with Sir Geoffry. When Lady Chavasse entered, he was deep in a story of the musical-box.

"Yes, a wicked boy went into Reuben Noah's, and broke his box for the purpose. Aunt Mary is letting me get it mended for him with some sixpences I had saved up. Reuben is very ill just now; in great pain; and Aunt Mary has let me lend him mine; he says when he can hear the music, his hip does not hurt him so much. You are not angry with me for lending it, are you, Sir Geoffry?"

"My boy, I am pleased."

"Why should Sir Geoffry be angry?" cried Lady Chavasse, amused with the chatter.

"Sir Geoffry gave it to me," said Arthur, looking at her with wide-opened eyes, in which the great wonder, that anybody should be ignorant of that fact, was expressed. "Reuben wishes he could get here to see the peacock; but he can't walk, you know. I painted a beautiful one on paper and took it to him. Aunt Mary said it was not much like a real peacock;

it was too yellow. Reuben liked it; he hung it up on his wall. Oh!"

For the stately peacock, stepping past the window as if the world belonged to him, suddenly threw wide his tail in an access of native vanity. The tail had not long been renewed, and was in full feather. Arthur's face went into a radiant glow. Lady Chavasse, smiling at the childish delight, produced some biscuit that the peacock was inordinately fond of, and bade him go and feed it.

"Oh, Geoffry," she exclaimed in the impulse of the moment, as the boy vaulted away, "if you had but such a son and heir as that!"

"Ay. It might have been, mother. That child himself might have been Sir Arthur after me, had you so willed it."

"Been Sir Arthur after you!" she exclaimed. "Are you in a dream, Geoffry? *That* child?"

"I have thought you did not know him, but I never felt quite sure. He passes to the world for the son of Colonel Layne—as I trust he may so pass always. Don't you understand?"

It was so comical a thing, bringing up thoughts so astounding, and the more especially because she had never had the remotest suspicion of it, that Lady Chavasse simply stared at her son in silence. All in a moment a fiery resentment rose up in her heart: she could not have told at whom or what.

"I will never believe it, Geoffry. It *cannot be!*"

"It *is*, mother."

He was leaning against the embrasure of the window as he stood, watching the boy in the distance throwing morsels of biscuits right into the peacock's mouth, condescendingly held wide to receive them. Lady Chavasse caught the strange sadness glistening in her son's eyes, and

somehow a portion of her hot anger died away.

"Yes: there was nothing to prevent it," sighed Geoffry. "Had you allowed it, mother, the boy might have been born my lawful son, my veritable heir. Other sons might have followed him: the probability is, there would have been half a dozen of them feeding the peacock now, instead of—of—I was going to say of worse than none."

Lady Chavasse looked out at the boy with eager, devouring eyes: and whether there was more of longing in their depths, or of haughty anger, a spectator could not have told. In that same moment a vision, so vivid as to be almost like reality, stole before her mental sight—of the half-dozen brave boys crowding round the peacock, instead of only that one on whose birth so cruel a blight had been cast.

"A noble heir he would have made us, mother; one of whom our free land might have been proud," spoke Sir Geoffry in a low tone of yearning that was mixed with hopeless despair. "He bears my name: Arthur. I'd give my right hand; ay, and the left, too; if he could be Sir Arthur after me!"

Arthur turned round. His cap was on the grass, his blue eyes were shining.

"He is frightfully greedy and selfish, Lady Chavasse. He will not let the peahen have a bit."

"A beautiful face," murmured Sir Geoffry. "And a little like what mine must have been at his age, I fancy. Sometimes I have thought that you would see the likeness, and that it might impart a clue."

"Since when have you known him?"

"Since the day after the accident. Duffham dropped an unintentional word, and it enlightened me. Some nights ago I dreamt that the little lad was my true

heir," added Sir Geoffrey. "I saw you kiss him in the dream."

"You must have been letting your thoughts run on it very much," retorted Lady Chavasse, rather sharply.

"They are often running on it, mother: the regret for what might have been and for what is, never seems to leave me," was his reply. "For some moments after I woke from that dream I thought it was reality: I believe I called out 'Arthur.' Rachel started, and inquired between sleep and wake what the matter was. To find that it was only a dream—to remember that what *is* can never be changed or redeemed in this world, was the worst pain of all."

"You may have children yet," said Lady Chavasse, after a pause. "It is not impossible."

"Well—I suppose not impossible," was the hesitating rejoinder. "But——"

"But you don't think it. Say it out, Geoffrey."

"I do not think it. My darling mother, don't you see how it is with me?" he added in an impulse of emotion—"that I shall not live. A very short time now, and I shall be lying with my father."

A piteous cry broke from her lips. It had to be suppressed. The ungrateful peacock, seeing no more dainty biscuit in store, had fluttered off with a scream, putting his tail down into the smallest possible compass; and Arthur came running back to the room. Mr. Duffham next appeared; his face grave, his account of Lady Rachel evasive. He suspected some latent disease of the spine, but did not wish to say so just yet.

The horse and pony were brought round. Arthur and the doctor mounted: Arthur turning round to lift his cap to Lady Chavasse and Sir Geoffrey, as he rode away. A noble boy in all his actions, sit-

ting his pony like the young chieftain he ought to have been but for my lady's adverse will.

But Mr. Duffham was by no means prepared for an inroad on his privacy made that evening by my lady. She surprised him in his shabbiest parlor when he was taking his tea: the old tin teapot on the Japan tray, and the bread-and-butter plate cracked across. Zuby Noah, Duffham's factotum, was of a saving turn, and never would bring in the best things but on Sundays. He had a battle with her over it sometimes, but it did no good. Duffham thought Lady Chavasse had come to hear about Lady Rachel: but he was mistaken.

She began with a despairing cry, by way of introduction to the interview: Zuby might have heard it as she went along the kitchen passage but for her clanking pattens. The man was out that evening, and Zuby was in waiting. Duffham, standing on the old hearth-rug, found his arm seized hold of by Lady Chavasse. He had never seen her in agitation like this.

"Is it to be so really? Mr. Duffham, can *nothing* be done? Is my son to die before my very eyes, and not be saved?"

"Sit down, pray, Lady Chavasse," cried Duffham, trying to hand her into the chair that had the best-looking cushion on it, and wishing he had not slipped on his worn old pepper-and-salt coat.

"He ought not to die—to die and leave no children," she went on as if she were a lunatic. "If there were but one little son; but one; to be the heir! *Can't* you keep him in life?—there may be children yet, if he only lives."

Her eyes were looking wildly into his, her fingers entwined themselves about the old gray cuffs as lovingly as though they were of silk velvet. No: neither Duff-

ham nor anybody else had ever seen her like this. It was as though she thought it lay with Duffham to keep Sir Geoffry in life and to endow Chavasse Grange with heirs.

"Lady Chavasse, I am not in the place of God."

"Don't you care for my trouble? Don't you *care* for it?"

"I do care. I wish I could cure Sir Geoffry."

Down sat my lady in front of the fire, in her dire tribulation. By the way she stared at it, Duffham thought she must see in it a vision of the future.

"We shall have to quit the Grange, you know, if he should die: I and Lady Rachel. Better that I had quitted it in my young life; that I had never had a male child to keep me in it. I thought that would have been a hardship; but oh, it would have been nothing to this."

"You shall drink a cup of tea, Lady Chavasse—if you don't mind its being poured out of this homely tea-pot," said Duffham. "Confound that Zuby!" he cried under his breath.

"Yes, I will take the tea—put nothing in it. My lips and throat are dry with fever and pain. I wish I could die instead of Geoffry! I wish he could have left a little child behind to bless me!"

Duffham, standing up while she drank the tea, thought it was well that these trials of awful pain did not fall often in a lifetime, or they would wear out alike the frame and the spirit. She grew calm again. As if ashamed of the agitation betrayed, her manner took gradually a kind of hard composure, her face a defiant expression. She turned it on him.

"So, Mr. Duffham! It has been well done of you to unite with Sir Geoffry in deceiving me! That child over the way has never been Colonel Layne's."

And then she went on in a style that put Duffham's back up. It was not his place to tell her, he answered. At the same time he had had no motive to keep it from her, and if she had ever put the question to him, he should readily have answered it. Unsolicited, unspoken to, of course he had held his peace. As to uniting with Sir Geoffry to deceive her, she deceived herself if she thought anything of the kind. Since the first moment they had spoken together, when the fact had become known to Sir Geoffry, never a syllable relating to it had been mentioned between them. And then she went back to Sir Geoffry's illness.

"It is just as though a blight had fallen on him," she piteously exclaimed, lifting her hand and letting it drop again. "A blight."

"Well, Lady Chavasse, I suppose something of the kind did fall upon him," was Duffham's answer. And *that* displeased her. She turned her offended face to the doctor, and inquired what he meant by saying it.

So Duffham spoke out. He had said he would, if ever the opportunity came. Reverting to what had happened some eight or nine years ago, he told her that in his opinion Sir Geoffry had never recovered it: that the trouble had so fixed itself upon him as to have worked insensibly upon his bodily health. "Self-reproach and disappointment were combined, Lady Chavasse; for there's no doubt that the young lady was very dear to him," concluded Duffham. "And there are some natures that cannot pick up again after such a blow."

She was staring at Duffham with open eyes, not understanding. "You do not mean to say that—that the disappointment about *her* has killed Sir Geoffry?"

"My goodness, no!" cried Duffham,

nearly laughing. "Men are made of tougher stuff than to die of that kind of thing—of love, Lady Chavasse. What is it Shakespeare says?—'Men have died, and worms have eaten them, but not for love.' There is no question but that Sir Geoffry has always had an inherent tendency to delicacy of constitution," he continued more seriously. "It was warded off for a time, and he grew into a strong, hearty man: it might perhaps have been warded off for good. But the blight—as you aptly express it, Lady Chavasse—came: and perhaps since then the spirit has not been able to maintain its own proper struggle for existence—in which lies a great deal, mind you—and now that the original weakness has shown itself again, he can't shake it off."

"But—according to that—he is dying of the blight?"

"Well—in a sense, yes. If you like to put it so."

Her lips grew white. There rose before her mind that one hour of bitter agony in her lifetime and her son's, when he had clasped his pleading hands on hers, and told her in a voice hoarse with its bitter pain and emotion that if she decided against him he could never know happiness again in this world: that to part from one to whom he was bound by every tie that ought to bind man to woman, would be like parting with life. Entrenched in her pride, she had turned a deaf ear, and rejected his prayer: and now—there had come of it what had come. Yes, as Lady Chavasse sat there, she had the satisfaction of knowing that the work was hers.

"A warmer climate?—would it restore him?" she exclaimed, turning her hot eyes on Mr. Duffham.

"Had it been likely, Lady Chavasse, I should have sent him to it long ago."

She gathered her mantle of purple velvet about her as she got up, and went out of the room in silence, giving Duffham her hand to shake in token of friendship.

Duffham opened the front door, and was confronted by a tall footman, with a gold-headed cane and big white silk calves, who had been waiting in the air for his lady. She took the way to the Grange; the man and his protecting cane stepping grandly after her.

"Sir Geoffry Chavasse." Buried in her own reflections by the drawing-room fire, in the coming dusk of the winter's evening, Miss Layne thought her ears must have deceived her. But no. It was Sir Geoffry who advanced as the servant made the announcement; and she rose to meet him. Strangely her heart fluttered; but she had been learning a lesson in calmness for many years. He had, too, perhaps—and they shook hands quietly as other people do. Sir Geoffry threw back his overcoat from his wasted form as he sat down.

Wasted more than ever now. Some weeks have gone on since my lady's impromptu visit to Mr. Duffham's tea-table: winter is merging into spring, and the most sanguine could no longer indulge hope for Sir Geoffry.

"You have heard how it is with me?" he began, looking at Mary, after getting up his short breath.

"Yes," she faintly answered.

"I could not die without seeing you, Mary, and speaking a word of farewell. It was in my mind to ask you to come to the Grange for half an hour's interview—but I scarcely saw how to accomplish it—it might have raised some speculation. So, as the day has been fine and mild, I came to you."



"You should have come earlier," she murmured. "It is getting late and cold."

"I did come out earlier; but I have been with Duffham."

Moving his chair a little nearer to hers, he spoke to her long and earnestly. In all that was said there seemed to be a solemn meaning—as is often the case when the speaker is drawing to the confines of this world, and about to enter on the next. He referred a little to the past, and there was some mutual explanation. But it seemed to be of the future that Sir Geoffrey had come mostly to speak—the future of Baby Arthur.

"You will take care of him, Mary?—of his best interests?" And the tears came into Mary Layne's eyes at the words. He could not really think it necessary to ask it.

"Yes. To the very utmost of my permitted power."

"I am not able to leave him anything. You know how things are with us at the Grange. My wish would have been good——"

"It is not necessary," she interrupted. "All I have will be his, Sir Geoffrey."

"Sir Geoffrey! Need you keep up that farce, Mary, in this our last hour? He seems to wish to be a soldier; and I cannot think but what the profession will be as good for him as any other, provided you can *like* it for him. You will see when the time comes; all that lies in the future. Our lives have been blighted, Mary; and I pray God daily and hourly that, being so, it may have served to expiate the sin—my sin, my love, it was never yours—and that no shame may fall on him."

"I think it will not," she softly said, the painful tears dropping fast. "He will always be regarded as Colonel Layne's son—the very few who know otherwise: Mr. Duffham, Colonel and Mrs. Layne—and

Lady Chavasse now; all will be true to the end."

"Ay, I believe it, too. I think the boy may have a bright and honorable career before him: as much so perhaps as though he had been born my heir. I think the regret that he was not—when he so easily might have been—has latterly helped to wear me out, Mary."

"I wish you could have lived, Geoffrey!" she cried, between her blinding tears.

"I have wished it also," he answered, his tone full of pain. "But it was not to be. When the days shall come that my mother is alone, save for Lady Rachel, and grieving for me, I want you to promise that you will sometimes see her and give her consolation. Something tells me that you can do this, Mary—that she will take it from you; and I know that she will need it sadly. Be kind to her when I am gone."

"Yes—I promise it."

"You are the bravest of us all, Mary; and yet upon you has lain the greatest suffering!"

"It is the suffering that has made me brave," she answered. "Oh, Geoffrey, I am getting to realize the truth that it is better to have too much of suffering in this world than too little. It is a truth hard to learn—but once learnt, it brings happiness in enduring."

Sir Geoffrey nodded assent. He had learnt somewhat of it also—too late.

"I have begun a letter to Colonel Layne, Mary, and shall post it before I die. To thank him for——"

The words were drowned in a gleeful commotion—caused by the entrance of Arthur. The boy came dashing in from his afternoon study with the curate, some books under his arm.

"I have not been good, Aunt Mary. I gave him all the trouble I could, he said;

and I'm afraid I did; but, you see, I bought the marbles going along, instead of coming back, as you told me, and—who's that?"

In letting his books fall on a side table he had caught sight of the stranger—then standing up. The fire had burnt low, and just for the moment even the young eyes did not recognize Sir Geoffrey Chavasse. Mary stirred the fire into a blaze, and drew the crimson curtains before the window.

"What have you come for?" asked the little lad as Sir Geoffrey took his hand. "Are you any better, sir?"

"I shall never be better in this world, Arthur. And so you gave your tutor trouble this afternoon?"

"Yes; I am very sorry; I told him so. It was the marbles. I couldn't keep my hands out of my pockets. Just look what beauties they are!"

Out came a handful of "beauties," of many colors. But Mary, who was standing by the mantle-piece, her face turned away, bade him put them up again. Arthur began to feel that there was some kind of hush upon the room.

"I have been talking to Miss Layne about your future—for, do you know, Arthur, you are a favorite of mine," said Sir Geoffrey. "Ever since the time when my horse knocked you down—and might have killed you—I have taken a very warm interest in your welfare. I have often wished that you—that you"—he seemed to hesitate in some emotion—"were my own little son and heir to succeed me: but of course that cannot be. I don't know what profession you will choose, or may be chosen for you——"

"I should like to be a soldier," interrupted Arthur, lifting his sparkling eyes to Sir Geoffrey's.

"Your ideas may change before the

time for choosing shall come. A soldier may be as brave a servant of God as of his Queen. Should you ever become a soldier, will you remember this truth?"

"Yes," said Arthur, in a whisper, for the grave tones and manner impressed him with some awe.

Sir Geoffrey was sitting down and holding Arthur before him. To the latter's intense surprise he saw two tears standing on the wasted cheeks. It made him feel a sort of discomfort, and he began, as a relief, to play with the chain and seal that hung on the baronet's waistcoat. A transparent seal with a plain device on it.

"Should you like to have them when I am gone, Arthur—and wear them in remembrance of me when you are old enough? I think it must be so; no one can have a better right to them than my little friend who once nearly lost his arm by my carelessness. I will see about it. But I have a better present than that—which I will give you now."

Taking from his pocket the small Bible that had been his companion for some months, he put it into Arthur's hands, telling him that he had written his name in it; and the child, turning hastily to the fly-leaf, saw it there: "Arthur Layne. From G. A. C." Lower down were the words: "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

"Jesus said that," cried the boy simply.

"Jesus Christ. My Saviour and yours—for I am sure you will let Him be yours. Do not part with this book, Arthur. Use it always. Should it be your fate ever to encamp on the battle-field, let the Book be with you—your guide and friend. In time you will get to love it better than any other book that is to be had in the world."

The child had a tender heart and began

to cry a little. Sir Geoffry drew him nearer.

"I have prayed to God to bless you, Arthur. But you know, my child, He will only give His best blessing to those who love and serve Him. Whatsoever may be your lot in life, strive to do your duty in it, as before God; loving Him, loving and serving your fellow-creatures; trusting ever to Christ's atonement. These are my last solemn words to you. Do you always remember them."

His voice faltered a little, and Arthur began to sob. "O, Sir Geoffry, must you die?"

Sir Geoffry seemed to be breathing fast, as though agitation were getting too much for him. He bent his head and kissed the boy's face fervently—his brow, his cheeks, his lips, his eyelids—there was not a spot that Sir Geoffry did not leave a kiss upon. It quite seemed as though his heart had been yearning for those kisses, and as though he could not take enough of them.

"And now, Arthur, you must do a little errand for me. Go over to Mr. Duffham and tell him I am coming. Leave the Bible on the table here."

Arthur went out of the house with less noise than he had entered it. Sir Geoffry rose.

"It is our turn to part now, Mary. I must be gone."

Her sweet face was almost distorted with the efforts she had been making to keep down emotion before the child. She burst into a sobbing cry as her hand met Sir Geoffry's.

"God bless you! God bless you always, my darling," he murmured. "Take my thanks, once for all, for the manner in which you have met the past; there's not another woman living who would have done and borne as you have. This is no doubt our last meeting on earth, Mary;

but in eternity we shall be together forever. God bless you, and love you, and keep you always!"

A lingering hand-pressure; a steady look into each other's eyes, reading the present anguish there, reading also the future trust; and then their lips met—surely there was no wrong in it! and a farewell kiss of pain was taken. Sir Geoffry went out, buttoning his overcoat across his chest.

A fly was waiting before Mr. Duffham's; the surgeon and Arthur were standing by it on the pavement. Sir Geoffry got in.

"Good-bye, Sir Geoffry," cried the little lad, as Mr. Duffham, saying he should be at the Grange in the morning, was about to close the door. "I shall write and tell papa how good you've been, to give me your own Bible. I can write small-hand now."

"And fine small-hand it is!" put in old Duffham in disparagement.

Sir Geoffry laid his hand gently on Arthur's head, and kept it there for a minute. His lips were moving, but he said nothing aloud. Arthur thought he had not been heard.

"Good-bye, Sir Geoffry," he repeated.

"Good-bye, my child."

Sir Geoffry lay back in an easy chair in front of the fire in his library. The end was near at hand now, but he was bearing up quite well to the last. Lady Chavasse, worn nearly to a shadow with grief and uncertainty—for there were times yet when she actually entertained a sort of hope—sat away in the shade; her eyes watching every change in his countenance her heart feeling ever its bitter repentance and despair.

Repentance? Yes, and plenty of it. For she saw too surely what might have been and what was—and knew that it was

herself, herself only, who had worked out this state of things. Her self-reproach was dreadful; her days and nights were one long dream of agony. Lady Rachel was not with them very much. She lay down more than ever in her own room; and Lady Chavassee had begun to learn that this nearly continuous lying was not caused by inert idleness, but of necessity. The Grange was a sad homestead now.

The blaze from the fire flickered on Sir Geoffrey's wasted face. *Hers* was kept in the shadow, or it might have betrayed the bitterness of her aching heart. He had been speaking of things that touched her conscience.

"Yes, it was a sin, mother. But it might have been repaired; and, if it had, I believe God would have blessed us all. As it is—well, we did not repair it, you and I; and so—and so, as I take it, there has not been much of real blessing given to us here; certainly not of heartfelt comfort. I seem to see all things clearly now—if it be not wrong to say it."

Lady Chavassee saw them, too—though, perhaps, not exactly in the way he meant. Never was the vision, of what might have been, more vividly before her than now as he spoke. She saw him, a hale happy man; his wife Mary; their children, a goodly flock; all at the Grange, and herself first amidst them, reigning paramount, *rejoicing* in her good and dutiful daughter-in-law. Oh, what a contrast between that vision and reality! A pent-up groan escaped her lips; she coughed to smother it.

"Mother!"

"Well, Geoffrey?"

"You need not have suppressed my last letter to Mary—the one of explanation I wrote when I quitted her and the Grange. You might have been sure of me—that I would be true to my word to you."

No answer. There was a great deal that she would not suppress, beside the letter, if the time had to come over again. The fire-log sparkled and crackled and threw its jets of flame upward; but no other noise disturbed the room's stillness.

"Mother!"

"Well, Geoffrey?"

"I should like the child, little Arthur, to have my watch and its appendages. Have you any objection?"

"None."

"It will be looked upon, you know, as a token of remembrance to the little fellow who had so sharp an illness through my horse."

"Yes."

"And—I have two desks, you know. The old one of common stained wood I wish sent to Miss Layne, locked as it is. The key I will enclose in a note. Let them be sent to her when I am dead."

"It shall be done, Geoffrey."

"There's not much in the desk. Just a few odds and ends of papers; mementoes of the short period when I was happy—though I ought not to have been. Nothing of value; except a ring that I bought for her at Worcester at the time, and which she would not take."

"I promise it, Geoffrey. I will do all you wish."

"Thank you. You have ever been my loving friend, mother."

"*Ever*, Geoffrey?"

"Well—you did for the best there, mother, though it was a mistake. You acted for what you thought my welfare."

"Would you not like to see her, Geoffrey?"

"I have seen her, and bid her farewell. It was the afternoon I went to Duffham's and you said I had stayed too late. And now I think I'll lie down on the sofa and get, if I can, a bit of sleep: I feel tired."

To-morrow I will talk about you and Rachel—and what will be best for you both. I wish to my heart, for your sake and hers, that Rachel had borne a son: I am thinking of you both daily, and of what you will do when I am gone."

"I shall never know pleasure in life again, Geoffry," she cried with a catching sob. "It will be henceforth one of mortification and misery."

"But it will not last forever. Oh mother! how merciful God is!—to give us the blessed hope of an eternal life of perfect happiness, after all the mistakes and tribulations and disappointments of this! My darling mother! we shall all be there in company forever."

They buried Sir Geoffry Chavassee by the side of his father—and anybody that likes to go there may see his tomb against the graveyard wall of Church Dykely. My Lady Chavassee arranged the funeral.

The Earl of Derreston and a Major Chavassee were chief mourners, with other grand people. Duffham's diary gives the particulars, but there's no space here. Duffham was bidden to it; and brought Arthur Layne in his hand; in obedience to a private word of my lady's—for she knew the dead, if he could look out of his coffin, would like to see him following. The village brought up the rear; a tail half an acre long: and Dobbs the blacksmith felt as proud as ever was the Grange peacock, when he saw Colonel Layne's little son in a coach, amidst the gentlefolks. 'Twere out of respect to the Colonel's bravery, you might be sure, he told a select audience: and p'raps a bit a-cause o' that back accident to the child himself. And so, amidst poms, and coaches and comments, Sir Geoffry Chavassee was left in his last home.

*Final matters extracted from Duffham's Diary.*

It is eighteen months now since Sir Geoffry died; and strange changes have taken place. The world is always witnessing such: you go up, and I go down.

Admiral Chavassee came home and took possession of the Grange. My lady had previously quitted it. She did not quit Church Dykely. It seemed indifferent to her where she settled down; and Lady Rachel Chavassee had become used to my attendance and wished to stay. There was a small white villa to let on this side the Grange, and they took it. Lady Rachel lies down more than ever; when she goes out it is in a Bath chair. Old John Noah draws it. The spinal complaint is confirmed. I can do her no good; but I go in once or twice a week, and gossip. She is very fractious: and what with one thing and another, my lady has a trying life of it. They keep three servants; no carriage—save the Bath chair. What a change! what a change!

If ever there was a disappointed woman in this world; one who feels the humiliation of her changed position keenly; whose whole life is a long living repentance, it is Lady Chavassee. The picture of what might have been is ever in her mind; the reality of what is, lies around her. To judge by human fallibility, she has a long existence before her: not quite fifty yet, and her health rude: but in spirit she is a bowed, broken-down woman.

The Grange is let. Sir Parker Chavassee could not reconcile himself to live in a rural district, and went back to his ship. At first he shut the Grange up; now he has let it for a term to Mr. and Mrs. McAlpin, formerly of Calcutta. They live there with their children; in as good style as ever the Chavassees did. Allan

McAlpin has given up business, and spends his large fortune like the gentleman he is. She is Mary Layne's sister; a dainty and rather haughty woman. My lady looks out surreptitiously from a corner of her window as Mrs. McAlpin's carriage bowls along the road beyond the field. Colonel Layne's wife is also here just now, on a visit at the Grange. The whole county calls upon them, and seems proud to do it, forgetting perhaps that they were but the daughters of my predecessor, Layne, the apothecary. Yes; there are strange ups and downs in this world: and Mary Layne, so despised once, might not now be thought, even by my lady, so very unequal to Sir Geoffrey Chavasse.

*She* does not go in for grandeur. But the village would like to lay its hands under her feet. Never was there so good, so unselfish, so sweet and humble-minded a woman. In a temporary indisposition that attacked her a week ago, Mr. Dobbs, struck with consternation, gave it as his opinion that Church Dykely "could afford to lose the whole biling of 'em better nor her." Lady Chavasse has seen her merit at last; and Mary's frequent presence in their house seems to bring light to the two lonely women. Arthur goes there, too: my lady loves him, curious though the fact may sound. An incident occurred the other evening,

Miss Layne and Arthur were at tea there, when I happened to go in with some

medicine. Mary had her work out, and sat talking in a low voice to Lady Rachel on her sofa; Lady Chavasse was watching Arthur, playing on the grass-plat. My lady rose up with a sudden cry.

"Take care of the wasp, Sir Arthur! Sir Arthur!"

I saw what painful reverie she had been lost in—the vision of that which might have been. It is apt to come on her at sunset. Becoming conscious of the slip, she flushed slightly, and turned it off. Lady Rachel laughed. She thought it a good joke. Mary was more silent than usual that night, as I walked home by her and Arthur's side.

Here ends the history. Mary Layne lives on in her home, training Arthur, helping the sick and suffering, keeping her face steadily turned to another world. Never a one is there amidst us so respected as that good, grave lady, who blighted her life in early womanhood, and who carries its trace on her sad sweet countenance, and its never-ceasing shame on her sorrowing heart.

That's all at last. You must be glad of it. Old Duffham shall not lead me blindfold into one of his spun-out-histories again. The trouble I've had to cut it down! What with the diaries and letters it was twice as long.

And he called it a tale of sin. I think it is more like a tale of suffering.

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